

Congressional Theatre

Dramatizing McCarthyism
on Stage, Film, and Television

brenda murphy



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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
Part I: The Committee and the Culture	
1 The Stage Is Set	9
2 The Social Drama	35
3 Dramatizing Directly Investigation <i>Big Jim McLain, Thirty Pieces of Silver, You're Next</i> Interrogation <i>Are You Now or Have You Ever Been</i> Blacklist "Blacklist," <i>Fear on Trial, The Front, Guilty by Suspicion</i>	75
Part II: Making Analogies	
4 Witch Hunt <i>The Crucible, The First Salem Witch Trial, The Witchfinders</i>	133
5 Inquisition Joan of Arc, Unfriendly Witness <i>Saint Joan, The Lark, Joan of Lorraine, Joan of Arc, The Execution of Joan of Arc</i> Galileo, Cooperative Witness <i>Galileo, Lamp at Midnight, The Crisis of Galileo, The Recantation of Galileo Galilei</i>	162

Contents

6	Informers	206
	<i>The Hook, On the Waterfront, A View from the Bridge, After the Fall</i>	
7	Forensics	226
	The Self and Others	
	<i>Darkness at Noon, Montserrat, Incident at Vichy</i>	
	The Individual and The State	
	<i>The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial, The Andersonville Trial</i>	
Conclusion	Further Fields	255
	<i>High Noon, Panic in the Streets</i>	
	<i>Notes</i>	265
	<i>A Note on Archives and Library Collections</i>	287
	<i>Works Cited</i>	289
	<i>Primary and Secondary Sources</i>	289
	<i>Government Documents</i>	298
	<i>Screen Credits</i>	299
	<i>Television and Radio Credits</i>	300
	<i>Index</i>	301

The Stage Is Set

Critical comment on the performance of the Dies committee indicates that most reviewers would not recommend further government subsidies of \$25,000 to stage such a dull and witless circus, a show certainly too poor in entertainment value (though it is summer) to justify the expense of production.

Champion Labor Monthly, September 1938

[The Hollywood Ten hearing] has been launched with that ineffable touch of showmanship which the naive Easterner associates with a Hollywood premiere, lacking only in orchids, evening dress and searchlights crisscrossing the evening sky.

Cabell Phillips, *New York Times*, 26 October 1947

In a speech to the American Association for the Advancement of Science on 13 September 1948, President Harry Truman warned that crucial scientific work might “be made impossible by the creation of an atmosphere in which no man feels safe against the public airing of unfounded rumors, gossip and vilification.” This atmosphere, he said, “is un-American, the most un-American thing we have to contend with today. It is the climate of a totalitarian country in which scientists are expected to change their theories to match changes in the police state’s propaganda line.”¹ Even for the blunt-speaking Truman, these were strong words, and their meaning was emphasized by the story that appeared next to the report of his speech on page one of the *New York Times*: a report on the pursuit of one Arthur Adams by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which quoted chairman J. Parnell Thomas as saying that the Committee had “a great amount of testimony” on Adams, and that he hoped that Adams “could be found, be brought to Washington, and be questioned.”² Regardless of the guilt or innocence of Mr. Adams, his fate was sealed. He had been named by HUAC, and he faced the recriminations of a populace, a large por-

tion of which believed he was a Communist conspirator simply because he was called before the Committee and questioned about his affiliations without benefit of trial, judge, jury, or the right to cross-examine his accusers or present his side of the case. If he was a teacher, an employee of the government or the film industry, a member of an AF of L union, or an employee of a business that followed the directives of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce or the American Legion, he would almost certainly lose his job. He might also be harassed by his neighbors, his children attacked at school, his family hounded out of the neighborhood. Such was the atmosphere Truman was talking about, the atmosphere surrounding the House Committee on Un-American Activities at its most powerful, in the years from 1947 to 1956.

The House Committee on Un-American Activities was established on a temporary basis in 1938 “for the purpose of conducting an investigation of (1) the extent, character, and object of un-American propaganda activities in the United States, (2) the diffusion within the United States of subversive and un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of domestic origin and attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by the constitution, and (3) all other questions in relations thereto that would aid Congress in any necessary remedial legislation.”³ The temporary Committee was chaired by Martin Dies (D-Texas) from its inception until its end in 1944. In the context of the rising global political tension that was soon to erupt in World War II, the establishment of the Committee was one of a number of measures taken to ensure the national security by guarding against subversion of the government from within the United States. In June 1940, the Congress passed by a vote of 382 to 4 an expanded version of the Alien Registration (Smith) Act, which called for the registration and fingerprinting of all aliens over the age of fourteen and the deportation of the criminals and subversives among them. In a provision that was to be fundamental to the activities of the Committee, the bill also made it a crime to conspire “to organize or help to organize any society, group, or assembly of persons who teach, advocate, or encourage the overthrow or destruction of any government in the United States by force or violence; or to be or become a member of, or affiliate with, any such society, group, or assembly of persons, knowing the purposes thereof.”⁴ Although a number of efforts to have the Communist Party of the United States declared illegal failed, it was argued that, since Communism advocated the overthrow of government, by violent revolution if necessary, to accomplish the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” any mem-

ber of the Communist Party by definition advocated “the overthrow of the United States Government by force and violence.” Twelve leaders of the Communist Party were tried and convicted under the Smith Act, and the convictions were upheld by the Supreme Court in 1951.

In 1945, through a smart parliamentary maneuver, Representative John Rankin (D-Mississippi) engineered the establishment of a permanent House Committee on Un-American Activities, but was in turn maneuvered out of the Committee chairmanship. John S. Wood (D-Georgia) chaired the Committee from 1945 until 1952, with a brief but influential interruption, when it was chaired by one of its most avid members, J. Parnell Thomas (R-New Jersey). With another brief interruption when it was chaired by Harold Velde (R-Illinois), the Committee was presided over by Francis E. Walter (D-Pennsylvania) from 1955 to 1963. In 1947, President Truman had headed off attacks on his administration by demanding a loyalty oath for federal employees. In April 1951, the president stiffened the test of loyalty for employees of the U.S. government. Under the first executive order, an employee could be fired if “reasonable grounds existed for belief that the person involved is disloyal to the government of the United States.” In 1951, all that was required for dismissal was “reasonable doubt as to the loyalty of the person involved.”⁵ In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower authorized dismissal of any federal employee who cited the Fifth Amendment to avoid testifying at a congressional hearing.

The force behind this increasing pressure to affirm one’s loyalty was an intensification of the environment that Truman had warned about in 1948. The McCarran Internal Security Act, passed over President Truman’s veto in September 1950, read in part: “Whenever there shall be in existence [an Internal Security Emergency], the President, acting through the Attorney General, is hereby authorized to apprehend and by order detain, pursuant to the provisions of this title, each person as to whom there is reasonable ground to believe that such person probably will engage in, or probably will conspire with others to engage in, acts of sabotage.”⁶ The McCarran Act required the registration of all Communists and Communist organizations with a new Subversive Activities Control Board and provided for “internal security emergencies” and the detention of suspected subversives. James V. Bennett, director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, announced in September 1952 that \$775,000 had already been expended for the activation and rehabilitation of six “relocation camps,” the facilities where Japanese Americans had been interned during World War II, which were capa-

ble, he estimated, of holding more than sixty thousand Communists.⁷ In 1954, Congress passed the Communist Control Act, which virtually outlawed the Communist Party and denied certain civil rights to Communists and “Communist-front” organizations.

In taking these extraordinary measures, the government was reacting to a number of events inside and outside the United States that contributed to the country’s ever-increasing anxiety about what FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover referred to as the “enemy within.” In 1950 and 1951, Americans witnessed the conviction of Alger Hiss for perjury related to charges of espionage, Senator Joseph McCarthy’s (unsupported) charge that 205 State Department workers were members of the Communist Party; the upholding by the Supreme Court of the conviction of U.S. Communist Party leaders under the Smith Act; the arrest of atomic spy Klaus Fuchs in England; the sentencing of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg to death for conspiracy to steal atomic secrets; the fall of China to the Communists; the outbreak of the Korean War; and the first successful atomic explosion by the Soviet Union. A good indication of the country’s mood is the activity of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which released a series of pamphlets suggesting ways to deal with what it perceived as the menace to the American way of life posed by Communism. The 1946 pamphlet “suggested the institution of a strict federal loyalty program and an investigation of Communist influence in the cultural media, notably the motion picture industry”; the 1947 pamphlet called for the Department of Justice to publish, biannually, “a certified list of Communist-controlled front organizations and labor unions” and demanded an “anti-Communist” modification of the Wagner Act; the 1948 pamphlet demanded “federal legislation barring Communists from positions in teaching, social work, book reviewing, and libraries.” The 1952 “master plan” virtually disregarded the Constitution in calling for “an untrammelled investigation and prosecution of Communists, the complete exclusion of Reds and fellow travelers from all agencies and professions affecting public opinion, from all educational or literary positions, from jobs of high visibility, prestige, and salary, particularly those in the entertainment field, and from any plant or factory large enough to have a trade union local.”⁸

The country’s anxiety about Communism reached a peak during the short career of Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) as the chief anti-Communist spokesperson. This career ran its course between his charges against the State Department in 1950 and his defeat in the “Army-McCarthy Hearings” and censure by the Senate

for “conduct that tends to bring the Senate into dishonor and disrepute, to obstruct the constitutional processes of the senate, and to impair its dignity” in 1954. The intense focus on Communism during the McCarthy years, however, was thoroughly prepared for by the steadily building intensity of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, which had focussed the country’s attention on Communists and “Communist sympathizers” as early as 1938. By 1950, the Committee had firmly established two rituals. The first was a ritual of absolution for its “friendly” witnesses, which included accusation, exposure, repentance – proven by informing on others – and absolution. The second was a ritual of degradation for its “unfriendly” witnesses, consisting of accusation after accusation, followed by the continuous taking of the Fifth Amendment; despite the Supreme Court’s warning that no guilt could be inferred from a witness’s seeking the Fifth’s protection – “I decline to answer because the answer may tend to incriminate me” – it carried an insinuation of guilt. As Representative Richard M. Nixon (R-California) spelled it out for a witness, “It is pretty clear, I think, that you are not using the defense of the Fifth Amendment because you are innocent.”⁹

The Federal Theatre Project, 1938

Under the chairmanship of Martin Dies, the Special Committee was largely a tool for attacking the New Deal, and one of its first targets in 1938 was the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), which was seen as the most vulnerable of the Works Progress Administration’s projects. J. Parnell Thomas launched his attack on 27 July 1938 in the *New York Times*, declaring that HUAC would make a sweeping investigation of the FTP and the Writers Project based on “testimony given before him at . . . informal and confidential hearings . . . being held by individual members of the committee.” Declaring that the FTP was a “hot bed of Communists” and “infested with radicals from top to bottom,” Thomas told the reporter that “practically every play presented under the auspices of the project either centered on a plot sympathetic to the cause of communism or serves as a vehicle for the propagation of New Deal theories.” He also charged that Project Director Hallie Flanagan “wrote and produced a Communist play called ‘Hear Their Voices’ while on a trip to Soviet Russia.”¹⁰ Flanagan’s unequivocal denial of the charges had no effect on Thomas. Stepping up the rhetoric, he charged on 10 August that the FTP, “a government agency, supported by public funds,

has become part and parcel of the Communist party, spreading its radical theories through its stage productions. . . . practically every single play presented under the auspices of the Theatre Project is sheer propaganda for communism or the New Deal.”¹¹ As historian Walter Goodman has noted, among the WPA projects, Federal Theatre was always considered something special,

a somehow frivolous enterprise when so many were out of work and hungry. Moreover, the notion of singling out for subsidy several thousand writers and actors strained the generous impulses of many Congressmen. Even if Federal Theatre had been operated in a condition of absolute ideological purity, it could not have held out against the anti-New Deal forces who were regrouping in 1938 and dreamed of destroying the WPA altogether; if they could not have hung Federal Theatre on a charge of radicalism, they would have done it on a charge of using dirty words.¹²

During the public testimony of Hallie Flanagan on 6 December 1938, the Committee offered no evidence for any of the charges made by Thomas beyond the testimony of the witnesses they had interviewed in their secret hearings. While Flanagan tried continually to return the Committee members to the charges that had been made and the brief she had prepared to refute them, the questioning ranged all over the lot as the congressmen tried to find something in her background that would establish her as a Red. A great deal of questioning centered on an article that Flanagan had written about workers’ theatre for *Theatre Arts Monthly*. One of the best-known moments in the Committee’s history occurred as Representative Joseph Starnes (D-Alabama) questioned Flanagan about this article. Noting that she had referred to “a certain Marlowesque madness” among the workers’ theatre participants, Starnes asked, “You are quoting from this Marlowe. Is he a Communist?”¹³ In her account of the hearing, Flanagan remembered that “the room rocked with laughter, but I did not laugh. Eight thousand people might lose their jobs because a Congressional Committee had so pre-judged us that even the classics were ‘communistic.’ I said, ‘I was quoting from Christopher Marlowe.’”¹⁴ The questioning continued:

Mr. Starnes: Tell us who Marlowe is, so we can get the proper reference, because that is all that we want to do.

The Stage Is Set

Mrs. Flanagan: Put in the record that he was the greatest dramatist in the period immediately preceding Shakespeare.

Mr. Starnes: Put that in the record because the charge has been made that this article of yours is entirely Communistic, and we want to help you.

Mrs. Flanagan: Thank you. That statement will go in the record.

Mr. Starnes: Of course, we had what some people call Communists back in the days of the Greek theater.

Mrs. Flanagan: Quite true.

Mr. Starnes: And I believe Mr. Euripides was guilty of teaching class consciousness also, wasn't he?

Mrs. Flanagan: I believe that was alleged against all of the Greek dramatists.

Mr. Starnes: So we cannot say when it began.¹⁵

Hallie Flanagan's brief was never entered in the record of the hearing. The Federal Theatre Project, a target of the House Appropriations Committee as well as HUAC, was abolished in the wake of the hearings, despite approval by the Senate Appropriations Committee, with the appropriations bill reading specifically that "none of the funds made available by this joint resolution shall be available: (a) After June 30, 1939, for the operation of any Theatre Project."¹⁶ The theatre and entertainment community had placed its support solidly behind the FTP. As Flanagan noted,

the variety of organizations and individuals coming out publicly for the continuance of Federal Theatre included every theatrical union, representing a combined membership of thousands; the Screen Actors' Guild, the Screen Directors' Guild, the Screen Writers' Guild, speaking for the vast Hollywood industry; entire companies of plays on Broadway, dramatic critics from coast to coast; distinguished actors, producers, directors, designers from New York and Hollywood; college and community theatres from the North, East, South, and West; the Federation of Arts Unions representing painters, sculptors, musicians, and artists of every field.¹⁷

In a typically theatrical show of support, Talullah Bankhead and a supporting cast had flown to Washington to testify before the Senate Appropriations Committee. The three major talent guilds in Hollywood had sponsored a national radio broadcast and mass demonstration. All of this good will and lobbying activity was to no avail, a perhaps ominous sign of the temper of the times.

The Hollywood Investigations

HUAC was established on a permanent basis in January of 1945, just five months before Germany surrendered to the Allies and eight months before Japan succumbed to atomic attack. Although Martin Dies had conducted a series of “subcommittee” hearings in which he personally “cleared” actors such as James Cagney, Fredric March, and Humphrey Bogart, who were accused by informants of Communist ties in 1940, the Committee did not turn its full attention to Hollywood until shortly after the war ended. In cooperation with motion-picture studio owners, HUAC held hearings that were aimed ostensibly at rooting out Communist infiltrators in the motion-picture industry. The Committee first targeted mainly writers, the well-known leftists of the Screen Writers Guild, in the 1947 hearings whose putative purpose was searching for Communist propaganda in Hollywood films. In 1951, when members of the Committee had discovered the power of publicity that attended their Show Business investigations, a second and far more comprehensive set of hearings was aimed at Hollywood figures who sent money into “Communist coffers” by contributing to various leftist causes.

Anti-Communist sentiment had been building in Hollywood since the early thirties, when a number of left-wing writers such as John Howard Lawson, Samuel Ornitz, and Herbert Biberman had come from the East and become active in making the Screen Writers Guild the most left-wing of Hollywood unions. *Variety* reported in 1933 that

Communism is getting a toehold in the picture industry . . . [among] a crowd of pinks listed on studio payrolls as writers, authors, scenarists and adapters. And though most of the new red movie recruits are getting anywhere from \$500 to \$1,500 a week their program calls for a fantastic sovietizing of the lots. Meeting place of the pinks is Venice. There they gather at least once a week to plan for the millennium when studios will be writer-controlled and producers will be hired hands. Most of the leaders of the literary-communist movement are easterners who have hit Hollywood during the past two years.¹⁸

After two particularly bitter strikes during the thirties, there was no love lost between the Hollywood producers and the unions, particularly the Screen Writers Guild. HUAC had had its eye on Hollywood since its earliest days under Martin Dies. In August 1938, Dies released a report from Committee investigator Edward F. Sullivan stating that Commu-

nism was rampant in the movie industry. In July 1940, Dies, at home in Beaumont, Texas, took private testimony from former Communist Party member, and probable paid police-informer, John L. Leech.¹⁹ Leech gave Dies the names of forty-two movie people and repeated them to a Los Angeles County grand jury a few weeks later, when a number of the names were leaked to the press. The result was that “newspaper headlines all over the country emblazoned their front pages with the news that Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, Fredric March, Franchot Tone, Lionel Stander, and over a dozen other stars had been named as Communists. Dies, alone in ‘executive session,’ promised clearance to all those who would ‘cooperate.’ Within two weeks of the ‘leak’ all but one of the named, actress Jean Muir, had appeared and all except Stander had been ‘cleared’ by the HUAC chairman.”²⁰ Stander was promptly fired by Republic Studios.

The next foray into Hollywood occurred in 1945, when John Rankin announced in a press conference that “one of the most dangerous plots ever instigated for the overthrow of this Government has its headquarters in Hollywood,” which he called “the greatest hotbed of subversive activities in the United States.” “We’re on the trail of the tarantula now,” said Rankin, “and we’re going to follow through.”²¹ A more temperate “committee spokesman” put the investigation in proportion, noting that the investigation involved “propaganda both clever and childish, in movies.” While nothing immediate came of this attack, it is a good indicator of the ardent fervor with which the Committee conducted its assault on Hollywood. The most even-handed of the historians of HUAC, Walter Goodman, has suggested some simple motivations for this vehemence. “To Rankin, Hollywood was Semitic territory. To Thomas, it was New Deal territory. To the entire Committee, it was a veritable sun around which the press worshipfully rotated. And it was also a place where real live Communists could readily be found.”²² We have already seen Thomas’s dislike of the New Deal in his comments on the FTP. Rankin regularly gave clear evidence of his dislike of Jews and foreigners, on the floor of the House, as when he commented on a petition from the Committee for the First Amendment that opposed HUAC: “I want to read you some of these names. One of the names is June Havoc. We found . . . that her real name is June Hovick. Another one was Danny Kaye, and we found out his real name David Daniel Kamirsky. . . . Another one is Eddie Cantor, whose real name is Edward Iskowitz. There is one who calls himself Edward Robinson. His real name is Emmanuel Goldenberg. There is another here

who calls himself Melvyn Douglas, whose real name is Melvyn Hesselberg.”²³ But it was the double promise of Communists who were celebrities that really drew the Committee to Hollywood, and they hit pay dirt with the hearings that investigated the so-called “Hollywood Ten” – actually nineteen – in 1947.

In their study *Inquisition in Hollywood*, Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund estimate that approximately 300 “movie people” – artists, technicians, backlot and front-office workers – joined the Communist Party during the decade from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War to the first wave of HUAC subpoenas (1936-47).²⁴ Although HUAC had had its eye on Hollywood, and particularly on the Screen Writers Guild, since the early days of the Dies Committee, the focus was intensified in May of 1947, when a subcommittee consisting of Thomas, John McDowell (R-Pennsylvania), and two investigators conducted a week of hearings in Los Angeles, during which they listened to fourteen actors, writers, and producers. After being “amazed at the revelations made by the witnesses and their frankness in naming names, places, dates, Communist card numbers, etc.,” Thomas concluded that “90 per cent of Communist infiltration was in the screen writing field” and that many of the “names” were “prominent persons, including prominent script writers.”²⁵ Two weeks later, the subcommittee issued an indictment based on what the witnesses had told them. It charged that the National Labor Relations Board was abetting the effort of Communist organizers to take control of the industry; that scores of highly paid screenwriters were injecting propaganda into movies; that White House pressure had resulted in the production of “some of the most flagrant Communist propaganda films”; that subtle techniques were used for glorifying the Communist Party, while the Communists prevented the production of films which glorified loyal American citizens; and that the heads of the studios had done nothing to prevent all of this.²⁶ Exposure was essential; public hearings were promised. As Walter Goodman has noted, “not one of the . . . charges would ever be substantiated, but the publicity which these coming attractions received bespoke high success for the feature event.”²⁷

This was the first stage of the Committee’s grandstand production, the hearings of 20–30 October 1947, which produced the “Hollywood Ten” and became the Thomas Committee’s greatest source of notoriety. After investigators had spent the summer in Los Angeles collecting “several volumes of testimony from people in all branches of the industry,”²⁸ on 21 September 1947 the Committee issued forty-three



Figure 1. Anti-Semitism did not stop Senator John Rankin from using Old Testament iconography to bolster his pursuit of Communists. In this publicity photo, he is draped with an anti-Communist petition to assume the authority of an Old Testament prophet.

subpoenas to people in the film industry, requiring them to appear at Committee hearings in Washington the following October. These proved to be an elaborately staged set of hearings; they centered on nineteen “unfriendly” witnesses, sixteen of them writers and all suspected Communists, who were subpoenaed to appear after a number of “friendly” witnesses, including Jack Warner, Ayn Rand, Adolphe Menjou, Robert Taylor, Ronald Reagan, and Gary Cooper, had drawn a picture of the Red propaganda in Hollywood films. Calling it “the most thoroughly publicized investigation [HUAC] has ever undertaken,” the *New York Times* report noted that “it has been launched with that ineffable touch of showmanship which the naive Easterner associates with a Hollywood premiere, lacking only in orchids, evening dress and searchlights crisscrossing the evening sky.”²⁹ The staging included “the biggest auditorium at the Capitol outside the House and Senate chambers themselves,” batteries of microphones and loudspeakers, press tables accommodating 120 reporters and special writers, six newsreel cameras poised above the witness table, and batteries of klieg lights, with extra photofloods dangling from the chandeliers. In a display of media almost unheard of in 1947, three major networks and two local radio stations recorded every word of testimony and spot-broadcast some of it directly from ringside.³⁰ It was the first of the Congressional media shows, preparing the way for the Army-McCarthy Hearings seven years later and the Watergate and Iran-Contra Hearings in the seventies and eighties.

Careful thought had been given to the presentation of the witnesses as well as the staging. The *Times* report noted that the testimony was “a careful synthesis designed for maximum impact on the public consciousness. Its substance is that Communists have elected the film industry as the principal vehicle for poisoning the American mind.” Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund have shown that the structure of the hearings was as carefully crafted as a four-act play.³¹ Act One consisted of the testimony of Jack Warner, who boasted of having “spotted” and fired twelve Communists from his studio. Act Two “introduced a long stream of ‘friendly witnesses’ . . . who matter-of-factly named three dozen ‘Communists’ whom they knew to be working in Hollywood”³² Act Three, wrote Ceplair and Englund, “was strictly comic opera.” This included a parade of stars, such as Robert Taylor, Robert Montgomery, Ronald Reagan, Gary Cooper, and George Murphy, whose function “was not to provide the Committee with information, but with luster. They did not name names, but lent



Figure 2. As these newspaper cartoons show, the American public understood the theatrical tactics of the Show Business hearings quite well. Illustrations: top, © by *The Tennessean*, 1947; bottom, reprinted by permission of the *Akron Beacon Journal*.

(their) names” and “provided HUAC with the means of neutralizing the impact on public opinion of the hostile and equally celebrated Committee for the First Amendment, due to arrive in Washington for the start of the final act on Monday, October 27.”³³ The charge that Communist writers had used the film industry for pro-Soviet propaganda was based on the analysis by witnesses like Ayn Rand and Robert Taylor of three pro-Soviet films that had been produced during the war years, one at the request of President Roosevelt, with the conscious aim of winning the support of the American public for its wartime ally, the Soviet Union. The films were *Song of Russia* (MGM, 1943), *Mission to Moscow* (Warner Brothers, 1943), and *North Star* (Samuel Goldwyn, 1942). All were sentimental films aimed at evoking the same emotional support for the U. S.’s alliance with the Soviet Union that *Mrs. Miniver* produced for its alliance with Britain. The Committee spent several days taking the testimony of “experts” on Communism, such as Ayn Rand and Adolphe Menjou, who professed to have made a “particular study of Marxism, Fabian Socialism, communism, Stalinism, and its probable effects on the American people, if they ever gain power here.”³⁴ Besides giving a copious supply of names to the Committee, Menjou, with Richard Nixon’s encouragement, offered a “test” for identifying a Communist:

Mr. Menjou: If you belong to a Communist-front organization and you take no action against the Communists, if you do not resign from the organization when you know the organization is dominated by Communists, I consider that a very, very dangerous thing.

Mr. Nixon: Have you any other tests which you would apply which would indicate to you that people acted like Communists?

Mr. Menjou: Well, I think attending any meetings at which Mr. Paul Robeson appeared, and applauding or listening to his Communist songs in America. I would be ashamed to be seen in an audience doing a thing of that kind.

Mr. Nixon: You indicated you thought a person acted like a Communist when he stated, as one person did to you, that capitalism was through.

Mr. Menjou: That is not Communistic per se, but it is very dangerous leaning, it is very close. . . .

Mr. Nixon: You indicated that belonging to a Communist-front organization, in other words, an association with Communists, attending these planned meetings, making statements in opposition to the capitalistic system are three of the tests you would apply.

Mr. Menjou: Yes, sir.³⁵

Mr. Menjou's "tests" were actually quite close to those applied by the committee in subpoenaing witnesses and demanding the names of those who attended meetings or who voiced opposition to such institutions as HUAC itself. Equally useful to the Committee's presentation was the testimony of Gary Cooper, who was not a self-proclaimed expert, but very clearly just a regular citizen when he appeared before the Committee. Asked by Thomas, "Do you believe as a prominent person in your field that it would be wise for us, the Congress, to pass legislation to outlaw the Communist Party in the United States?," Cooper replied, "I think it would be a good idea, although I have never read Karl Marx and I don't know the basis of communism, beyond what I have picked up from hearsay. From what I hear, I don't like it because it isn't on the level."³⁶

Act Four consisted of the testimony of the eleven unfriendly witnesses who were actually called to testify in October 1947, the "Hollywood Ten": John Howard Lawson, Dalton Trumbo, Ring Lardner, Jr., Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, and Adrian Scott – plus Bertolt Brecht. The "unfriendly nineteen" had decided that their ultimate hope lay with the Supreme Court, which they thought would overturn a citation for contempt of Congress if they presented a case based on the First Amendment of the Constitution, which protects freedom of speech. They settled on a strategy of reading statements that denied the Committee's right to inquire into their political beliefs on various grounds and asserting their right to answer the Committee's questions about their Party affiliation "in their own way" – that is, by evading the questions. With the appearance of the first unfriendly witness, John Howard Lawson, it was clear that this strategy would not be effective. Thomas refused to allow Lawson to read his statement and gavelled him to silence whenever he tried to state his position. An increasingly frustrated and obstreperous Lawson was finally removed forcibly from the stand:

The Chairman: (pounding gavel) . . . The question is: Have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

Mr. Lawson: I am framing my answer in the only way in which any American citizen can frame his answer to a question which absolutely invades his rights.

The Chairman: Then you refuse to answer that question; is that correct?

Mr. Lawson: I have told you that I will offer my beliefs, affiliations, and everything else to the American public, and they will know where I stand.

Part One: The Committee and the Culture

The Chairman: (pounding gavel): Excuse the witness –

Mr. Lawson: As they do from what I have written.

The Chairman (pounding gavel): Stand away from the stand –

Mr. Lawson: I have written Americanism for many years, and I shall continue to fight for the Bill of Rights, which you are trying to destroy.

The Chairman: Officers, take this man away from the stand –
(Applause and boos)³⁷

Thomas saw to it that Lawson's performance was followed by the testimony of Investigator Louis J. Russell, who produced a Communist Party card, "registration number 47275," in Lawson's name and submitted a nine-page memo detailing Lawson's defense of the Party in his writings and his participation in "Communist Fronts." The memo was calmly read aloud into the record by Robert Stripling, the Committee's chief investigator. The impact of the two scenes was to represent the Committee as a calm and judicious presenter of facts and Lawson as a boorish and evasive witness. Similar tactics were used with the other nine Americans, lumping them all into a category of boorish men who were disrespectful toward the United States Congress and lacking in candor about their own beliefs and activities.³⁸

Much of the support from the Hollywood community and the American public for the Hollywood Ten and much of the opposition to the Committee dissolved as a result of this carefully staged performance. The five witnesses who were currently employed by Hollywood studios were summarily fired. All ten were charged with contempt of Congress and convicted. They appealed the contempt citations on the grounds that their right of free speech included the right to remain silent and was impinged upon when they were forced under threat of punishment to disclose their political opinions and affiliations.³⁹ In 1949, the U.S. Court of Appeals unanimously upheld their convictions. On 10 April 1950, the Supreme Court refused to review the contempt convictions, and the Hollywood Ten went to jail. As Walter Goodman has noted, "the Hollywood hearings brought forward no heroes. The writers, puffed up with a sense of martyrdom, made a burlesque of a Jeffersonian cadre. . . . As for the Committee itself its premise in this investigation, that movies were being subverted by a Red underground in league with New Deal bureaucrats, was asinine; its methods were gross and its intentions despicable."⁴⁰

The Blacklist

Between 1947 and the early sixties, HUAC wielded enormous power over writers, actors, and directors who worked in film, radio, and the new medium of television. The cooperation of studio executives, and the guilds and unions, with the Committee resulted in a blacklisting of anyone who was named as a Communist or Communist sympathizer by a witness, or who was called as an “unfriendly” witness before the Committee and accused of any association with Communists at any time in the past.

The official blacklist began with the Hollywood producers in the wake of the 1947 hearings. On 20 October, as the hearings began, Eric Johnston, president of the Motion Picture Association of America and the Association of Motion Picture Producers, sent a breezy reassurance to the writers: “Tell the boys not to worry. We’re not going totalitarian to please this Committee.”⁴¹ And Jack Warner, a most cooperative friendly witness, told the Committee: “I can’t, for the life of me, figure where men could get together and try in any form, shape or manner to deprive a man of a livelihood because of his political beliefs.”⁴² Shortly after the hearings concluded, the five of the Hollywood Ten who were employed by Hollywood studios were fired. In its letter to Edward Dmytryk, RKO said that

by your conduct [before HUAC] and by your actions, attitude, association, public statements and general conduct before, at, and since that time, you have brought yourself into disrepute with a large section of the public, have offended the community, have prejudiced this corporation as your employer and the motion picture industry in general, and have lessened your capacity fully to comply with your employment agreement, and have otherwise violated the provisions of Article 16 of your employment agreement with us.⁴³

After a two-day closed meeting of fifty Hollywood producers was held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, the Association of Motion Picture Producers issued what has come to be known as the Waldorf Statement on 26 November 1947. Stating that the producers “deplore the action of the ten Hollywood men who have been cited for contempt,” it went on to say that while “we do not desire to prejudge their legal rights,” the producers would “forthwith discharge or suspend without compensation those in our employ and we will not re-employ any of the ten until such time as he is acquitted or has purged himself of contempt

and declares under oath that he is not a Communist.” Further, the producers pledged that they would “not knowingly employ a Communist,” and that, in “pursuing this policy, we are not going to be swayed by hysteria or intimidation from any source.” Acknowledging that this policy involved “the danger of hurting innocent people” and “the risk of creating an atmosphere of fear,” and that “creative work at its best cannot be carried on in an atmosphere of fear,” they promised to “guard against this danger, this risk, this fear. To this end we will invite the Hollywood talent guilds to work with us to eliminate any subversives, to protect the innocent, and to safeguard free speech and a free screen wherever threatened.”⁴⁴ A three-man delegation was sent to bring the producers’ decision to a meeting of the Screen Writers Guild. With this summary action by the producers and its overture to the guilds and unions, the entertainment industry’s official blacklist began.

Looking back on his experience in an article for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1961, Hollywood Ten member Ring Lardner, Jr. explained:

The industry blacklist policy was extended to cover every person subpoenaed by the committee who failed to answer all the questions put to him, or who having been named by a witness, did not appear voluntarily to clear or purge himself. It didn’t matter whether, as in the case of writers and directors, they might conceivably exert a subversive influence on the content of movies, although all the studio heads had sworn to the committee that even this was impossible under their vigilant control. Actors, musicians, technicians and stenographers were chopped from the payrolls with equal dispatch.

It also didn’t matter whether the grounds for not answering was the First Amendment, which the appellate-court decision in our case had rated as invalid protection, or the Fifth, which the Supreme Court had meanwhile upheld as a fully applicable use of a precious freedom that no man might legally construe as evidence of guilt.⁴⁵

Of the years between 1948 and 1953, Eason Monroe, head of the Southern California chapter of the ACLU, said:

These were the years of the slow steady purge – out of employment, out of community organizations, out of public posts of one sort or another, [and] out of political candidacies – of anyone who either had in his own personal record membership in the Communist Party or associated groups, or was a member of any family in which these

relationships were characteristic, or who had friends [who espoused such views], or who had ever attended a meeting, or who read the wrong literature, or for any reason at all.⁴⁶

The capitulation of the film industry to the Committee's Red-baiting was complete and even enthusiastic. Spearheaded by the anti-Communist zealot, Roy Brewer, a long-time power in the AF of L International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees in Los Angeles, the producers, the guilds, and the craft unions formed themselves in March 1949 into the Motion Picture Industry Council, whose sole purpose was to cooperate with HUAC. The Council took upon itself the job of publicizing the "Communist problem" in Hollywood and the industry's efforts to purge itself of "subversives," clear repentant unfriendly witnesses, and make life as difficult as possible for those who refused to repent. In a rejoinder to Ring Lardner's *Saturday Evening Post* article, Brewer, good union man that he was, declared that no blacklist had ever existed in the film industry, putting the notion down to the machinations of "the communists," who "set about selling the American public the idea that they were the pitiable victims of a diabolical 'blacklist.'" No "right-thinking person believes in 'blacklists,'" Brewer declared:

The term has evil overtones, echoes of a time when powerful employers created secret lists of employees they considered troublesome. By circulating these "blacklists" among themselves they were able to punish the unfortunate workers cruelly by depriving them of a chance to make a living. The practice has long since been outlawed and is recognized as unethical, immoral and illegal. Hollywood's communists cynically donned martyrs' robes as "victims of a blacklist," no doubt assuming that many Americans would overlook the fact that they were part of an international conspiracy aimed against the U.S.A.⁴⁷

In a sense, Brewer was right about the official Hollywood blacklist. The producers didn't need a secret list in order to enforce the Waldorf agreement. HUAC itself provided the list when it published the names of all the men and women who had appeared before a congressional investigating committee and refused to cooperate: 60,000 names in all. Of these, 212 were screen artists, producers, and studio workers, all promptly blacklisted.⁴⁸ Brewer of course did not mention the more per-

icious “graylists” that were maintained by the American Legion and so-called “smear and clear agencies.” These included American Business Consultants, formed by three ex-FBI agents in 1947, which published *Counterattack* and *Red Channels*, the two major industry sources for the names of “subversives,” whom producers could employ at their peril; the Wage Earners Committee, formed in October 1951; and Aware, Inc., established in December 1953 by Vincent Hartnett, who had worked for ABC, and some actors, and which published *Confidential Notebook* and supplements to the lists in *Red Channels*. Television producer Mark Goodson has also explained that “there were several private lists, and the major agencies and networks exchanged lists. . . . *Red Channels* would maybe have a couple of hundred names, but there might be on the other list at CBS several hundred more. Anybody could show up on a list, stars, technicians, cowboys.”⁴⁹ The enterprising Vincent Hartnett made a good living as a compiler of dossiers on show-business personalities. Calling himself a “talent consultant,” he charged \$5 a head for short reports, and \$20 for long reports.⁵⁰ The reports included any activity – such as an actor’s signature on a petition or attendance at a rally or meeting that was also attended by Communists – that might open a producer to the charge of hiring “Communist sympathizers.” Since the dossiers were secret, a graylistee often had no idea what he was charged with, becoming aware of the graylist only when he was fired, or stopped being hired. Francis J. McNamara, who was to become director of HUAC in the sixties, testified before the Committee that he liked to think of his work with the anti-Communist organ *Counterattack* as similar to that of Dun & Bradstreet – handing out credit ratings on people – and he pointed out that nobody called Dun & Bradstreet a blacklisting outfit.⁵¹

The submission of the producers and the New York “money men” to these right-wing influencers of popular opinion might be understandable, but the desertion of writers, actors, directors, and others by their guilds and unions is harder to fathom. The Screen Writers Guild was known as the most left-wing of Hollywood unions and had even been the target of an attempt at union-busting by the studios and conservative writers in the late thirties, with the short-lived Screen Playwrights, Inc. Shortly after the 1947 HUAC hearings, in November, the Screen Writers Guild elections completely changed the character of the guild, ousting radicals from positions of power. Ceplair and Englund report that

the Board then commenced to purge almost all left-wingers and suspected left-wingers from the SWG executive and administrative struc-

ture. The sweep of the moderates' broom was reflected in the composition of the Guild committees for 1948. Prior to November, 1947, leftist liberals, radicals, and Communists constituted fully a third of the membership of every committee; afterward, it was a rare committee which included even two left-wingers out of twelve or more members, and most committees had none at all. . . . It is fair to say that the Left ceased to exist in any organized, meaningful sense in the Screen Writers Guild.⁵²

The SWG Board then authorized its president to turn over to HUAC investigators all union records, thus exposing any member who had expressed left-wing sentiments at a meeting to a subpoena and blacklisting.

As the Hollywood Ten went through their process of conviction, appeals, and imprisonment, the unions became increasingly timid. The last of the Ten went to prison in September 1950. It was a much changed United States that viewed a new round of Hollywood subpoenas in the spring of 1951. It had been a year since Senator Joseph McCarthy had made his baseless charge that there were 205 Communist Party members in the State Department. Alger Hiss had been found guilty of perjury and Judith Coplon guilty of conspiracy to commit espionage (a conviction that was later overturned). The Soviet Union had set off an atomic bomb. President Truman had sent troops into Korea. Communist Party leaders had been tried and convicted of conspiracy to preach subversion under the Smith Act. The McCarran Internal Security Act now required that members of the Communist Party register with the Justice Department. In April, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg would be sentenced to death for conspiracy to steal atomic secrets and President Truman would announce that federal employees might be fired if there was "reasonable doubt" of their loyalty. In March, eight radical screen actors and writers were served with HUAC subpoenas. Three of them – Larry Parks, Waldo Salt, and Richard Collins – were members of the 1947 "Nineteen" who had not been called to testify. When actress Gale Sondergaard appealed formally to the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) for support, she received a letter from the Board, which stated in part:

Your letter (1) attacks as an inquisition the pending hearings by the House Committee on Un-American Activities into alleged Communist Party activities by a few individuals and (2) asks that the Guild protect you against any consequences of your own personal decisions

Part One: The Committee and the Culture

and actions. . . . If any actor by his own actions outside of union activities has so offended American public opinion that he has made himself unsaleable at the box office, the guild cannot and would not want to force any employer to hire him. That is the individual actor's personal responsibility and it cannot be shifted to his union.⁵³

In October 1950, the SAG executives had drafted a loyalty oath similar to the one already employed by the armed forces and defense industries, which was not accepted by the rest of the industry. Only the opposition of the Screen Writers Guild scuttled a proposal for an industry-wide loyalty board that was placed before the Motion Picture Industry Council in June 1951.⁵⁴ As Goodman has put it, "even those who a few years before had protested against Communist-hunting expeditions now granted that the pursuit of Communists, wherever they might be found, was a natural right of Congress. In fact, it seemed to be a right of whoever cared to pursue them. From around the country came inspiring reports of Communists being exposed, suspended, fired, evicted, tried, deported, boycotted, blacklisted, and physically set upon. The public temper invited, and the Committee joined in the sport."⁵⁵

The 110 witnesses who were subpoenaed in the second set of hearings were on their own as they faced the Committee. All were approached by HUAC investigators and urged to testify, that is "to avow their Communist pasts, acknowledge that they had seen the light, and (as proof of regency) provide the Committee with the names of others who had strayed."⁵⁶ Fifty-eight of them decided to follow this path in the wake of the agonizing testimony of Larry Parks, perhaps the most heartrending moment in HUAC history, as Parks agreed to "crawl through the mud," as he memorably phrased it, and become the first unfriendly witness to name names. In 1953, the Committee broadened its focus to include Broadway, radio, and the fledgling television industry, which were centered in New York. It held hearings at the United States Court House in Foley Square, New York, in May of that year, and in 1955 it held an extended "show business" hearing in New York, with little success. Only one of twenty-three witnesses "cooperated," while eighteen invoked the Fifth Amendment and four others refused to testify on other grounds.⁵⁷ A few days before the start of the hearings in 1955, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) authorized its local units to take disciplinary measures against any member who failed to answer questions before a Congressional committee. Under this provision, a member could be fined, censured,

suspended, or expelled on the charge of conduct prejudicial to the welfare of the union. Although AFTRA had previously condemned the blacklisting organization AWARE for circulating lists of entertainment figures named in reports of the Un-American Activities Committee, it now supported the blacklisting of anyone who invoked the Fifth Amendment before the Committee.

The reality in the fifties was that an actor or writer who was subpoenaed by the Committee, or named by another witness as a Communist or “Communist sympathizer,” or whose name appeared in one of the “smear and clear” organizations’ lists of “subversives,” could not work in the movies or television unless he or she admitted to former “Communist activities,” expressed repentance and remorse for these activities, disavowed all loyalty to Communism, and reaffirmed loyalty to the United States under oath. After 1950, the ritual of requiring witnesses to “name names,” to inform on others as well as confessing their own sins, became a standard part of HUAC interrogations. Thus anyone questioned by the Committee about his political beliefs and activities was faced with blacklisting if he (1) refused to answer or (2) invoked the First or Fifth Amendments, or (3) admitted to an interest in Communism in the past, repented for it, and affirmed his loyalty to the United States, but refused to implicate others.

Larry Parks, who spoke openly about his membership in the Communist Party in the early thirties, but who showed extreme reluctance in naming others – eventually being allowed to do so in executive session rather than a public hearing – was aware that his “uncooperative” demeanor would probably cost him his career, although he did manage to avoid a contempt citation and prison term. As he told the Committee: “I think my career has been ruined because of this. . . . There was another choice open to me. I did not choose to use it. I chose to come and tell the truth.”⁵⁸ He was subsequently questioned about his statement by Counsel Frank Tavenner and Representative Donald Jackson of California:

Mr. Tavenner: I did not fully understand your reference to the possible destruction of your career by being subpoenaed here. You did not mean to infer by that that this committee was bringing you here because of any effect it might have on your career?

Mr Parks: No, I didn’t infer that at all. What I meant, and what I said, was that because of this, in my opinion, I have no career left. . . . I have tried to cooperate with the committee in every way that I feel that I can, but I think the damage has been done. . . .

Mr. Jackson: Don't you think that more than the damage that possibly has been done you by this committee, which, after all, is an expression of the will of the American people and operates under the mandate of the people, don't you think the great damage occurred when you became a member of an organization which has been found to advocate the overthrow of every constitutional form of government in the world? Is this committee more to blame than your own act in affiliating with that organization?⁵⁹

Larry Parks's career, at its peak with his recent appearance in *The Jolson Story*, was indeed destroyed. He was blacklisted until, after humbling himself to the Committee in 1953 and declaring in his letter of July 15 that if he were "to testify today I would not testify as I did in 1951 – that to give such testimony is to 'wallow in the mud' – but on the contrary I would recognize that such cooperation would help further the cause in which many of us were sincerely interested when we were duped into joining and taking part in the Communist Party,"⁶⁰ he was finally cleared. He had only three minor roles between 1953 and his death in 1976. Actor Lionel Stander, who had not been "cleared" when he testified before Martin Dies on 27 August 1940 that he was not a Communist, had requested an immediate appearance before the Committee when he was named by witness Marc Lawrence in 1951. When he was finally called to testify on 6 May 1953, he complained to the Committee that, "receiving the subpoena, with the press's announcement that I was subpoenaed, caused me to be blacklisted in radio, television, and motion pictures. So, I had an immediate economic motive for an immediate appearance."⁶¹ Asked about his employment history, he responded:

Mr. Stander: . . . I worked for independent producers –

Mr. Tavenner: Approximately –

Mr. Stander: – Up until the time Mr. Marc Lawrence mentioned my name, or rather, up until the time Larry Parks said he didn't know me as a Communist.

Mr. Tavenner: Let me –

Mr. Stander: And that appeared in the paper, and just to have my name appear in association with this committee – it seems like something; it shouldn't; I agree – I know it isn't the committee's fault. It is like the Spanish Inquisition.

Mr. Tavenner: Let me remind you –

Mr. Stander: You may not be burned, but you can't help coming away a little singed.⁶²

Mr. Stander remained on the blacklist.

In order to be restored to the status of loyal American, and to get off the blacklist, one had to become what leftists quickly labeled an “informer,” which led to a kind of blacklisting of its own – an ostracism by the Left. When actors John Garfield and José Ferrer gave signs of being about to name names, they were excoriated by the *People's Daily World*:

Make no mistake about it, Garfield and Ferrer are betraying everything that's decent and honorable in our land to the fat pigs of Wall Street who are wallowing in their blood-soaked profits. They are just as guilty, just as dishonorable, as the German actors Werner Krauss and Emil Jannings who joined Hitler's fight against communism in the early '30's. . . . They are contributing to the incitement of a holocaust alongside of which World War II was child's play.⁶³

No one, however, was attacked with greater vehemence than director Elia Kazan, who had testified about his own membership in the Party during the thirties and had named seven former members of the Group Theatre, all well known to the Committee, as the price for continuing to work in films. In typical Kazan style, he had gone on the offensive, taking out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* in which he urged other liberals to “speak out,” declaring: “Secrecy serves the Communists. At the other pole, it serves those who are interested in silencing liberal voices. The employment of a lot of good liberals is threatened because they have allowed themselves to become associated with or silenced by the Communists.”⁶⁴ It was assumed in Hollywood and New York that Kazan, one of the most successful and highly paid directors both in Hollywood and on Broadway, had caved in to the studios – and thus the Committee – for the money. When Kazan's testimony was cited to Tony Kraber by the Committee in 1955, he replied, “Is this the Kazan that signed the contract for \$500,000 the day after he gave names to this Committee? Would you sell your brothers for \$500,000.”⁶⁵ The *Daily Worker* was content with name-calling: “We have seen a lot of belly-crawling in this time of the toad, but nothing has quite equaled last week's command-performance by Hollywood director Elia Kazan. . . . Not even in Hitler days did renegade intellectuals sink so low. . . . Kazan is not content with being a toad. He must also be a philosopher of toadyism.”⁶⁶

In 1956 John Cogley did a *Report on Blacklisting* for the Fund for the Republic, which published it in two volumes, one on the movies and the other on radio and television. The study detailed what everyone in

the industry knew – that blacklisting had caused hundreds of persons to be denied employment because of their political views and associations, and that the promoters of the blacklists, and in some cases those who made their living by them, were the same people who were allowed to judge who would or would not be employed. Cogley was subpoenaed to appear before the Committee and questioned, not about the presumably Un-American activity of blacklisting, but about himself and the Fund for the Republic, the object clearly being to cast aspersions on the objectivity and factualness of the report. Chairman Walter “did not have to read the report to know that he disagreed with it on two counts. First, he denied there was any such thing as a blacklist and second, he wanted all Communists driven out of films, theater, radio, television, and, if feasible, out of the country.”⁶⁷ The Committee then called a number of “expert” witnesses to report on the question of blacklisting, including Brewer, James F. O’Neill of the American Legion, who said that blacklisting was reprehensible but that persons identified with the Communist apparatus should not be employed in the entertainment industry, and Francis J. McNamara, who compared his smear-and-clear work to that of Dun & Bradstreet. This instance of the Big Lie was one of the rhetorical triumphs of the the Committee. The hearings demonstrated to the public that the Committee and its supporters all opposed blacklisting, because they said they did. At they same time they reaffirmed their stance that Communists should not be allowed to work. And by subpoenaing Cogley and interrogating him, they cast an aura of suspicion around him and anyone else who would try to call blacklisting by its name.