

Behind Hollywood Red Bogey Is Fitts' Effort to Keep His Corrupt Regime in L. A.

By Harold Mehling

(Special to the Sunday Worker)

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 24.—In 1938 Hollywood's actors, writers and directors deserted the ivory tower for California's muddy political battleground where progressive and trade union forces were fighting one of the oldest entrenched reactionary Republican machines in the nation.

With the formation in filmdom of such rank-and-file organizations as the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and the Motion Picture Democratic Committee, the Hollywoodites found themselves naturally and necessarily allied with organized labor.

And one of labor's bitterest enemies in Southern California is the hawk-nosed tool of such Big Business vigilante outfits as the Associated Farmers—Los Angeles county's district attorney, Buron Fitts.

Faced with a fight for renomination in the Aug. 27 primaries, Fitts got up from his customary four-year sleep and on the night of Sunday, Aug. 4, Los Angeles Hearst newspapers and open-shopper Harry Chandler's "Times" boomed in headlines:

"RED MASS MURDER PLOT BARED."

"COMMUNIST PLOT TO TAKE OVER PACIFIC COAST REVEALED."

It was no surprise that the "stories" emanating from Fitts' office charged Brittain Webber, a militant member of the CIO International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union, with committing an alleged murder in 1935

by the Communist Party of Los Angeles and a thoroughly discredited professional informer.

For three days, Fitts defied the law of the land and the constitution of the United States by keeping Webber in the virtual state of a kidnap victim, spirited about from sheriff's office to sheriff's office so his families or friends couldn't locate him.

Held incommunicado during those three days, Webber finally was produced in court after Defense Attorneys Gallagher, Wirin and Johnson obtained a writ forcing the surrender of the unionist by the district attorney's deputies.

Typical of Fitts' disregard for the law he is supposed to enforce was his shouting in court to Attorney Leo Gallagher:

"You can go to hell. I'll produce him (Webber) when I want to."

About this time, the Grand Jury took its cue and subpoenaed approximately 50 members of the film colony to appear and answer charges of "Communism" as weaved by stool-pigeons John Leech.

Leech had named countless numbers of movie stars, screen

writers, producers and directors as "Communists" or "contributors to the Communist Party."

CALLED LIAR

Leech's testimony in the Harry Bridges' deportation proceedings, was termed that of a "pathological liar" by Dean James M. Landis of Harvard University. Leech testified for Dies recently in Beaumont, Texas, on "subversive" activities.

Actor Lionel Stander was the first to answer Leech's testimony as he belittled Fitts and charged Fitts was electioneering with his "mass murder plot."

"I understand the Federal Bureau of Investigation has refused to cooperate with or pay any attention to Buron Fitts' latest attempts to smear Hollywood luminaries with a red brush to further his own selfish end," he said.

"I don't know why I should pay any attention to it, either. I never heard of Riley (supposed murder victim in 1935) or Webber. Fitts knows this," said gruff-voiced Stander.

"I know that elections are elections, for I have campaigned against Fitts, but I object to his trying to get himself elected by mixing me up in a murder plot.

"This Fitts' story wouldn't bring 10 cents on movie's poverty row. It's too hackneyed," laughed Stander.

Director-producer Herbert Biberman, active in the organization of the American Peace Crusade here, compared Fitts to a comical character in a recent movie

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warehousemen's union, was committing an alleged murder in 1935 and every Hollywood progressive, past and present, with being Communist participants of the "red mass murder plot."

PRE-ELECTION STUNT

Fitts was pulling one of his typical pre-election campaign stunts, hoping to again befuddle the public and utilize the war hysteria to return to office—even if he had to railroad a few persons to prison.

During his 12 years in office, District Attorney Fitts has carried on endless and for the most part fruitless persecutions of trade unionists, allowing Los Angeles to become what former U. S. Attorney General Frank Murphy has called "the most corrupt, graft-ridden city in the United States."

Los Angeles Mayor, Fletcher Bowron, elected to office in 1938 by the combined efforts of progressive, church and trade union organizations, in a radio address last week asked Angelenos to oust Fitts and elect John F. Dockweiler, candidate endorsed by Labor's Non-Partisan League.

Fitts "has made no honest attempt to further the cause of good government, to clean the Augean stables, to bring to justice those who have long been engaged in the business of corrupting public officials and employes charged with public trust," said Mayor Bowron.

"Buron Fitts has been in office too long," he continued. "He is under obligation to too many people. Contributing to his various elections have been leaders of the underworld, bookmakers, racketeers, gamblers, heads of the heretofore powerful gambling syndicate, or combination.

"The total amount of such contributions runs into millions of dollars."

NO FELONY CONVICTIONS

Since 1937, Fitts' office has prosecuted trade unionists on 1,509 counts of felony. Not a single felony conviction has been obtained.

These prosecutions have cost Los Angeles county taxpayers more than \$250,000, with 32 misdemeanor convictions as the total receipt. His major fiascos of 1939 alone against automobile workers, warehousemen and clothing workers ran up a bill of more than \$150,000.

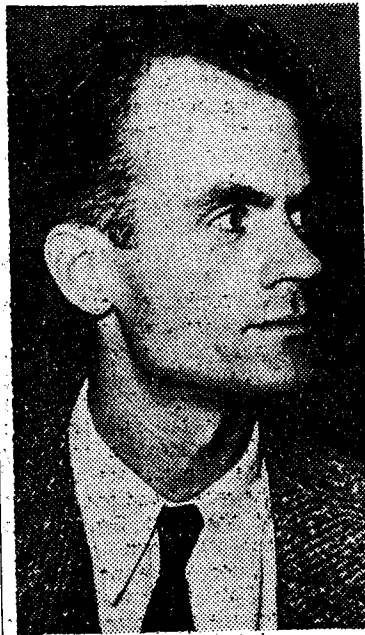
So in 1940, Fitts found his reelection strongly opposed by the labor, church and liberal alignment, all determined to "OUST BURON FITTS."

It was significant that the CIO, particularly the International Longshoremens and Warehousemen's Union, was taking the lead in the anti-Fitts drive along with the Hollywood progressives heading the local American Peace Crusade, who found Fitts trying to block them at every step.

On the night of Friday, Aug. 2, District Attorney Fitts began his 1940 campaign in earnest, a campaign which has since met keen and telling defiance. His deputies swooped down on the neighboring town of San Pedro and arrested Webster of the ILWU on the phony murder charge.

At the same time, Fitts laid his plans for the smear of Hollywood by calling in John Leech, an expelled member of the Com-

numbers of movie stars, screen



BRITAIN WEBSTER, longshoreman whom Fitts picked for his victim in his great pre-election "red scare" bustout.

cal character in a recent movie and charged his "implication" was due to Biberman's recent denunciation of Fitts on the City Hall steps.

"I have been publicly active in opposing Fitts' reelection," he said. "I denounced him on the steps of the City Hall before 20,000 people.

"I was very much amused by the character of Sheriff Pinky Hartman in the motion picture 'His Girl Friday,' I never believed I should meet him in the flesh."

Samuel Ornitz leading Hollywood screen writer in announcing the receipt of a Grand Jury subpoena charged Fitts with persecution of the peace movement in Southern California.

"We are going to welcome this opportunity to make Mr. Fitts make good on his melodramatic charges," said Ornitz.

"It's obvious that Fitts' campaign is being concentrated against the three or four people who have conducted the campaign against him. This is also too obvious a blow at the American peace movement since a very

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strong if not strongest point in that movement is Southern California and Los Angeles.

"Mr. Fitts is using his office to spit in the face of democracy," said Ornitz. "I have it on good authority that Fitts' biggest backers, 'our best' gamblers and madames, feel that he has overstepped his bounds.

"When 'our best' won't take Fitts' stuff, it just won't do."

In an organized effort to bring the "Amazing Story of the Britt Webster Case" before the public, Hollywood luminaries and labor leaders staged a gigantic presentation here in the Philharmonic auditorium.

More than 2,000 people that night heard Fitts leading opponent, John F. Dockweiler, reiterate his stand that if elected his office would not be used as a "union-busting" office, which had been charged to Fitts.

James Cagney became the next Hollywood personage to flatly call Leech a liar. Leech's charges are "ridiculous and silly," he said and declared he had never met Leech, who "accused" him of giving aid to the San Joaquin Valley strikers in 1934, which Cagney admitted proudly.

AIDED SCOTTSBORO BOYS

"When you are told that a person is sick and in need, you don't ask his religion, his nationality, or his politics," he said. "Take the Scottsboro case. I gave, and so did others, because we were informed these boys were not getting a fair trial.

"That's all the money was given for," said Cagney. "And it was the same with regard to the Salinas and San Joaquin situations. We heard that babies were being born in fields and that people were hungry."

But Schulberg, son of prominent producer B. P. Schulberg, expressed his disgust when he called Fitts and Leech "un-American."

When it does, so hopefully civil war of they are being alist war into way elephant, barking dog editors of the that goes on it is in their detail what it is defending. If we take into consid- eration the work of the Hitler Fifth Columnists in the old and new French government and army—it seems then, that the "Fifth Columnists" here are moving heaven and earth to Hitlerize America and should their Conscription Bill pass, why, then we'll already have the typical Hitler principles. The time is at hand for the great masses of the American people to awaken and make themselves heard to the government which is according to democ- eratic tradition) ours—before we lose this liberty.

met Leech, let alone "give contributions to the Party."

Actor Fredric March called Leech an "unmitigated liar" in testifying before the Dies Committee in secret session at the Biltmore hotel here. Mrs. March said her husband wanted to "sock" Leech.

From labor, the CIO Industrial Union Council said: "Fitts is trying hard to get reelected."

Labor's Non-Partisan League charged him with shielding racketeers while persecuting labor.

"The district attorney is again sallying forth on a wooden horse to save the people from everything except the racketeers and special interests who help him keep in power," LNPL asserted.

Among other Hollywood people "fingered" for Fitts by Stoolpigeon Leech were Producer Fritz Lang, Actors Frances Lederer, Franchot Tone, J. Edward Bromberg, Humphrey Bogart and Melvyn Douglas and Actress Jean Muir.

Producers Gregory La Cava and his wife, Beryl La Cava; Director Frank Tuttle and his wife, Tanya Tuttle, and Screen Writer Philip Dunne also obligingly were named by Leech.

About the only person left off the Leech list was Shirley Temple.

Ironical was the dismayed wrath of Douglas and Dunne. They had played leading parts in the political upsurge of 1938, but have since made their peace with reaction and taken turns at greasing the local wheels of the Roosevelt war machine.

Also ironical was the wrath of Congressman Martin Dies when he learned that Fitts had crimped one of his "best" witnesses, Leech, and was stealing Dies' thunder in California.

Dies immediately hopped from Texas to Los Angeles, grabbed off a handful of headlines on his