

Mr. James Lardner PLEASE FORWARD  
c/o Outlook  
The Washington Post  
1150 15 St.,nw  
Washington, DC 20071

Harold Weisberg  
7627 Old Receiver Rd.  
Frederick, MD 21702

Dear Mr. Lardner,

From the moment I read your excellent piece in this morning's Post it has not been possible for me to get it out of mind or to return to my own work for which, a bit older than your father and in seriously impaired health, I do not have the time I'd like.

I'd forgotten that I had written your father and I do not find a copy of the letter I wrote him. I write you on the chance that you or other children or grandchildren of some of those wonderful (all but one!) Ten might be interested.

I knew Marty Popper well. Drove him around in Washington, bent elbows with him, and to the best of my knowledge Dmytryk's coming to me and his in effect robbing me was not known to Marty.

I am aware of the decision to use the first rather than the first and fifth or the fifth amendment alone. What some of the Ten probably did not know is that there was also a plan to fight the UnAmericans and with the attention the Ten could have gotten then perhaps it might have made a difference.

It was to prepare for that fight that Dmytryk came to see me, brought by a man who had been an investigator for the Senate Civil Liberties Committee of which I had been both an investigator its editor.

What they left with is unprecedented in our history and because of what I was able to do to get that information steps were taken to see to it that nobody else could ever do such a thing. What I had on the UnAmericans was beyond belief. It included every cent they'd spent and how they's spent it and a full set of bound clippings for all the major publications of the day.

They came after me well before they went for the Ten. They tried to frame me. I did fight back and I succeeded in taking the grand jury away from the United States attorney. I got the pig the UnAmerican's used to frame me convicted, rather charged with two felonies. Dies copped a plea for him and he confessed but served no time.

There is more to it than that if there is any interest but it is not safe for me to travel and I've not driven out of Frederick since 1977. But if anyone is doing what I hope one is, trying to make a full record for our history, I'll help all I can. There really should be at least oral history. Thanks for a fine piece and the best, with respect, for your mother and father, sincerely, Harold Weisberg

*Harold Weisberg*



# The Gilding Of the Blacklisted

*A Son of the Hollywood Ten  
Revisits a Heroic Legacy*

By James Lardner

**H**ollywood, which knows how to make a fuss, made one last week over the 50th anniversary of the House Un-American Activities Committee's (HUAC) attempt to examine "subversion" in the movies, and over my father, Ring Lardner Jr., and nine other members of the "Hollywood Ten" who impolitely refused to say whether they were or ever had been communists, and who else was or ever had been.

When my father's turn came, he was 32 years old. He already had an Oscar to his credit (for co-writing the Spencer Tracy/Katharine Hepburn comedy "Woman of the Year") and a fat contract with Twentieth Century Fox. His reply ("I could answer. . . but I would hate myself in the morning") got him bodily removed from the hearing room. In short order, he was fired, imprisoned for nine and a half months and blacklisted. He spent the better part of the next two decades scrambling for whatever pseudonymous TV and movie work he could get. Even so, he was luckier than some—luckier than my mother, Frances Chaney, who became unemployable in radio where she had been a star ("Gangbusters," "Terry and the Pirates") and in movies, where she was just getting started. History, in my family, doesn't get any more relevant than this.

See BLACKLIST, C4, Col. 1

*James Lardner is a writer living in New York.*



11/2/97



1947 ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

**"I could answer. . . but I would hate myself in the morning": Scriptwriter Ring Lardner Jr. is escorted from the witness stand after declining to answer the big question from the House Un-American Activities Committee in Washington.**



#### BLACKLIST, From C1

The HUAC hearings were a pivotal event for me, too—no matter that I wasn't born until the following year. For much of my infancy and toddlerhood, while the contempt of Congress case against the Hollywood Ten wound its way through the courts, my father clung to the idea that the whole mad business would soon "blow over." Things certainly looked pretty good to me from the tennis court that served as my playpen—the court on which Greta Garbo, one of the neighbors who occasionally came over for a game, gave me an affectionate nuzzle, ignoring the protests of my germ-conscious nurse, who was worried as usual that I might catch something. When the Supreme Court refused to hear the Hollywood Ten's appeal, the tennis court and the nurse were rudely taken from me, along with the other entitlements of my life as a young prince of Hollywood.

There are plenty of would-haves and could-haves for me to contemplate here, and I was not about to object to the scale of last Monday's night's ceremonies. Billy Crystal and Kevin Spacey, among others, reenacted bits of testimony, and my father, now 82, after a long and tearful ovation, read the statement he had not been allowed to read 50 years earlier, in which he intended to tell the committee that "compared to what I have seen and heard in this room, Hollywood is a citadel of freedom. . . ."

As important as the anniversary was to us Lardners, though, I suspect there may be some truth to the grumbling of a few sourpusses, like Charlton Heston, that conscience and principle do not entirely explain such a commemoration; an element of fashion is also at work. That being so, not everyone who supports the cause has bothered to give it a whole lot of thought. The blacklistees, in their turn, have achieved a measure of eclat in the movie world; some of their supporters, however, may not have thought out exactly what they're supporting. The ceremonies, for example, featured many passionate statements about the dangers that now, as then, beset the First Amendment. But the sincere interest that the blacklist experience undoubtedly does hold for many in Hollywood today probably has more to do with a sense of remoteness than of immediacy. The anti-communist witch hunt was as close as this country recently has come to the familiar state of affairs elsewhere in which political affiliations can get people jailed or tortured or killed. For people who work in the movies today, I suspect that the image of a professional peer defying a panel of nasty inquisitors, and thereby kissing a cushy life goodbye, holds something like the eye-gluing fascination of those home videos that occasionally make it onto national televi-

sion of people plunging from skyscrapers.

Life is not likely to present Crystal, Spacey or me with a decision on which so much rides. And it is impossible not to wonder: What if it did? Like the audience in Hollywood last week, I regard my father's actions as heroic, and by contrast, I am more than a little sickened by the testimony of say, the director Edward Dmytryk (the other surviving member of the Hollywood Ten), who after six months in prison, went back to Washington to swear his abhorrence of communism and to name the names that were always the bottom line of these proceedings.

But just as it is easy now to revere the "unfriendly" witnesses who refused to testify, it is easy to revile the "friendly ones"—too easy for those of us who will never face such a

predicament. "There were no heroes, only victims," observed Dalton Trumbo, one of the Ten, expressing a sentiment that never caught on very widely with his fellow black-listees, but one to which my father also subscribed. A couple of days ago, in answer to a question I put to him by telephone, my father told me that if he were an Oscar juror, he would probably vote to give the great director Elia Kazan one of those lifetime-achievement-type awards that have repeatedly been denied him by young Hollywood whippersnappers who weren't even alive when he knuckled under to HUAC.

No sooner had my father said this, however, than my mother (more of a hard-liner in these matters) seized the phone to suggest that if Kazan got an award, it should contain a notation that he had named not just a few names but a long list, including her friends Morris Carnovsky and Phoebe Brand and others in the acting company known as the Group Theater, which, she added, "taught him everything he knew."

It infuriates Kazan, Dmytryk and other surviving friendly witnesses, that Hollywood continues to have such disdain for those who (as Dmytryk put it in a recent memoir) "prized their country more than the party of Stalin and Brezhnev." And, indeed, there was not a lot of talk about Stalin or Brezhnev at last week's ceremonies.

When I was sorting all this out as a child, certainly, the blacklist package came with communism included. The First Amendment wasn't a thing that floated in space. It had a connection I could see to certain actual political activities. Communism and Soviet Russia were, at any rate, not deplored in our





Above: Nine of the infamous Hollywood Ten turn themselves in at the U.S. Marshal's office in Los Angeles to face contempt of Congress charges. From left to right: Robert Adrian Scott, Edward Dymtryk, Samuel Ornitz, Lester Cole, Herbert Biberman, Albert Maltz, Alvah

Bessie, John Howard Lawson and Ring Lardner Jr. Below: Dalton Trumbo, the 10th man, is excused from further testimony after he declines to say whether or not he is a communist. He surrendered to authorities a day after the rest of the group.

1947 ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS



family as they were, say, in my school, where such words were usually accompanied by grim expressions or instructions to hide under our desks. There was a lot of material for a child trying to size up his father. There still is.

In New York City, where we eventually relocated, most of my parents' friends had been blacklisted. When they enter my thoughts, a question sometimes sneaks in with them: How could Sol, Kate or Marty have overlooked all the ghastliness that communism was inflicting in the part of the world where it was an actual (and to some extent an observable) working experiment? I wonder now how my parents and so many



others could have failed to understand the dangers built into a situation in which a minority of sectarian zealots took power by violence, and then set out to impose their doctrine on a vast population with habits and attitudes that the doctrine deemed retrograde. Surely, force and terror were bound to become the defining characteristics of such a society. So, at any rate, we know now.

People live out their lives in the folds of history. Today, we look back at the fall of communism—the last big ripple—and declare the folly of central planning and crude egalitarianism. Some people even proclaim as historical “fact” that material progress depends on free-floating capital and huge disparities in wealth. To young Americans of my father’s generation, the Great Depression was the event that dominated the horizon, and along with the drift toward fascism in Europe, it proved to many that capitalism was coming apart just as Karl Marx had prophesied. Others found in Marx the solution as well as the problem and still others saw Marxism well-embodied in the work of Lenin and Stalin.

But if Stalinism was inevitable in Russia, it was preposterous in the United States. And it wasn’t at all what most American communists had in mind. In Hollywood, the party helped create the movie unions, organized support for the loyalists in the Spanish Civil War and took up questions involving the rights of women and blacks when few other organizations would. The witch hunters liked to expose this or that mild-sounding group as a “front;” another way of putting it is that in a lot of what our homegrown communists thought and did, they bore a strong resemblance to, well, liberals. The Hollywood Ten pleaded the First Amendment (free speech),

rather than the Fifth (the protection against self-incrimination) because they didn’t regard party membership as a crime. The Supreme Court, in deciding in 1951 that it was, based its ruling on the premise that the party advocated the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. But if the feelings of the great majority of flesh-and-blood American communists count for anything, the party advocated no such thing. To my father and others in Hollywood, the idea of revolutionary struggle was for some other part of the world, not for a democracy.

The end of World War II freed the American press from its patriotic duty to portray our Soviet ally in glowing terms. The result was a fresh flow of information about Stalinist terror that, along with provocations closer to home, caused my father to develop big qualms. By the time of HUAC hearings in 1947, he was fighting for the right to be a communist when he personally wasn’t so sure he wanted to go on being one.

There was, of course, something peculiar about Hollywood as a seedbed of communism. I have often wondered if HUAC didn’t do its victims a favor, on some level, by yanking them out of such a schizoid life. The blacklist was a broadening experience, certainly, for a lot of people. My father’s dear friend Paul Jarrico, for example—caught in the second round of HUAC hearings in 1951—promptly organized a production company in which all the principals were blacklisted, and then, in a remarkable campaign of guerrilla ingenuity and doggedness, made a movie called “Salt of the Earth” against the coordinated opposition of studios, unions, labs and the federal government, which went as far as to have the leading lady deported midway through shooting.

(Jarrico, a lovely man, was a co-honoree with my father at last week’s HUAC commemoration. After a celebratory lunch on Tuesday, he evidently fell asleep while driving home and collided, fatally, with a tree.)

In prison, my father started a novel, “The Ecstasy of Owen Muir,” which is being published again this month. And the whole blacklist experience had something to do, I’m sure, with the bite of his screenplay for “M\*A\*S\*H,” which was called an anti-war movie but got its comic drive from the struggle against bureaucracy instead. Since my father never served in the Army, I suspect that the Communist Party taught him a little of what he obviously did know about bureaucracy.

Out of the blacklist, too, came a TV series, “The Adventures of Robin Hood,” on which my father and yet another blacklisted, Ian McLellan Hunter, were principal writers. A doctoral thesis will, I have no doubt, be written someday about Robin Hood’s influence on American youth in the ‘50s. It was, at any rate, an important weekly ritual of my childhood. And, to my great pleasure, its subversive content has penetrated into the next generation, thanks to the magic of videotape.

If HUAC had not turned its attention to Hollywood 50 years ago, my children’s repertory of songs would not now include the “Robin Hood” TV theme song (“Feared by the bad, loved by the good, Robin Hood”), and Nicky, who is 3, would not be able to sing it, as he frequently does, while drying off after the bath in his hooded lincoln-green robe. Like me, Nicky and Emma are growing up with very open minds when it comes to outlaws.