

The following selections from some of the Hollywood Ten hearings show how unruly the sessions were. While the committee's chair, J. Parnell Thomas, and its counsel, Robert Stripling, tried to force the unfriendly witnesses to respond to the "\$64 Question"²—"Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?"—the witnesses tried to make political statements. More than once, Thomas had the committee's sergeants at arms physically remove a recalcitrant witness from the stand. After each hostile witness finished testifying, one of the committee's investigators read evidence of his Communist affiliations into the record.

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

Testimony before HUAC

October 27, 1947

STRIPLING: What is your occupation, Mr. Lawson?

LAWSON: I am a writer.

STRIPLING: How long have you been a writer?

LAWSON: All my life—at least thirty-five years—my adult life.

STRIPLING: Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

LAWSON: The raising of any question here in regard to membership, political beliefs, or affiliation—

STRIPLING: Mr. Chairman—

LAWSON: Is absolutely beyond the powers of this committee.

STRIPLING: Mr. Chairman—

LAWSON: But—

(THE CHAIRMAN POUNDING GAVEL.)

LAWSON: It is a matter of public record that I am a member of the Screen Writers Guild.

STRIPLING: I ask—

[APPLAUSE.]

CHAIRMAN: I want to caution the people in the audience: You are the guests of this committee and you will have to maintain order at all times. I do not care for any applause or any demonstrations of one kind or another.

²The phrase "\$64 Question" came from a popular radio quiz show by that name.

STRIPLING: Now, Mr. Chairman, I am also going to request that you instruct the witness to be responsive to the questions.

CHAIRMAN: I think the witness will be more responsive to the questions.

LAWSON: Mr. Chairman, you permitted—

CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel): Never mind—

LAWSON (continuing): Witnesses in this room to make answers of three or four or five hundred words to questions here.

CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lawson, you will please be responsive to these questions and not continue to try to disrupt these hearings.

LAWSON: I am not on trial here, Mr. Chairman. This committee is on trial here before the American people. Let us get that straight. . . .

STRIPLING: Have you ever held any office in the guild?

LAWSON: The question of whether I have held office is also a question which is beyond the purview of this committee.

(The chairman pounding gavel.)

LAWSON: It is an invasion of the right of association under the Bill of Rights of this country.

CHAIRMAN: Please be responsive to the question. . . .

LAWSON: I wish to frame my own answers to your questions, Mr. Chairman, and I intend to do so.

CHAIRMAN: And you will be responsive to the questions or you will be excused from the witness stand.

STRIPLING: I repeat the question, Mr. Lawson:

Have you ever held any position in the Screen Writers Guild?

LAWSON: I stated that it is outside the purview of the rights of this committee to inquire into any form of association—

CHAIRMAN: The Chair will determine what is in the purview of this committee.

LAWSON: My rights as an American citizen are no less than the responsibilities of this committee of Congress.

CHAIRMAN: Now, you are just making a big scene for yourself and getting all "het up." [Laughter.]

Be responsive to the questioning, just the same as all the witnesses have. You are no different from the rest. . . .

LAWSON: It is absolutely beyond the power of this committee to inquire into my association in any organization.

CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lawson, you will have to stop or you will leave the witness stand. And you will leave the witness stand because you are in contempt. That is why you will leave the witness stand. And if you are just trying to force me to put you in contempt, you won't have to try much harder. You know what has happened to a lot of people that have been in contempt of this committee this year, don't you?

LAWSON: I am glad you have made it perfectly clear that you are going to threaten and intimidate the witnesses, Mr. Chairman.

(The chairman pounding gavel.)

LAWSON: I am an American and I am not at all easy to intimidate, and don't think I am.

(The chairman pounding gavel.) . . .

STRIPLING: Mr. Lawson, are you now, or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party of the United States?

LAWSON: In framing my answer to that question I must emphasize 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.

McDOWELL: Now, I must object—

STRIPLING: Mr. Chairman—(The chairman pounding gavel.)

LAWSON: The question here relates not only to the question of my membership in any political organization, but this committee is attempting to establish the right—

(The chairman pounding gavel.)

LAWSON (continuing): Which has been historically denied to any committee of this sort, to invade the rights and privileges and immunity of American citizens, whether they be Protestant, Methodist, Jewish, or Catholic, whether they be Republicans or Democrats or anything else.

CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel): Mr. Lawson, just quiet down again.

Mr. Lawson, the most pertinent question that we can ask is whether or not you have ever been a member of the Communist Party. Now, do you care to answer that question?

LAWSON: You are using the old technique, which was used in Hitler Germany in order to create a scare here— . . .

STRIPLING: Mr. Chairman, the witness is not answering the question. . . .

CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel): We are going to get the answer to that question if we have to stay here for a week.

Are you a member of the Communist Party, or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party? . . .

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.

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

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.

CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). Excuse the witness—

LAWSON: As they do from what I have written.

CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). Stand away from the stand—

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.

CHAIRMAN: Officers, take this man away from the stand—

[Applause and boos.]

CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). There will be no demonstrations. No demonstrations, for or against. Everyone will please be seated.

RING LARDNER, JR.

Testimony before HUAC

October 30, 1947

STRIPLING: Mr. Lardner, are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

LARDNER: Mr. Stripling, I want to be cooperative about this, but there are certain limits to my cooperation. I don't want to help you divide or smash this particular guild, or to infiltrate the motion-picture business in any way for the purpose which seems to me to be to try to control that business, to control what the American people can see and hear in their motion-picture theaters.

CHAIRMAN: Now, Mr. Lardner, don't do like the others, if I were you, or you will never read your statement. I would suggest—

LARDNER: Mr. Chairman, let me—

CHAIRMAN: You will be responsive to the question. . . .

The question is: Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild? . . .

[Lardner spars with Thomas about whether he will be able to read his prepared statement.—Ed.]

CHAIRMAN: That is a very simple question. You can answer that "yes" or "no." You don't have to go into a long harangue or speech. If you want to make a speech you know where you can go out there.

LARDNER: Well, I am not very good in haranguing, and I won't try it, but it seems to me that if you can make me answer this question, tomorrow you could ask somebody whether he believed in spiritualism.

CHAIRMAN: Oh, no; there is no chance of our asking anyone whether they believe in spiritualism, and you know it. That is just plain silly.

LARDNER: You might—

CHAIRMAN: Now, you haven't learned your lines very well.

to a man guilty of what has always been considered as the most abominable of all crimes—of being a traitor to the people who gave him a position of great trust. The Secretary of State in attempting to justify his continued devotion to the man who sold out the Christian world to the atheistic world, referred to Christ's Sermon on the Mount as a justification and reason therefor, and the reaction of the American people to this would have made the heart of Abraham Lincoln happy.

When this pompous diplomat in striped pants, with a phony British accent, proclaimed to the American people that Christ on the Mount endorsed communism, high treason, and betrayal of a sacred trust, the blasphemy was so great that it awakened the dormant indignation of the American people.

He has lighted the spark which is resulting in a moral uprising and will end only when the whole sorry mess of twisted, warped thinkers are swept from the national scene so that we may have a new birth of national honesty and decency in Government.

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The Hollywood Blacklist Begins: Studio Heads Fire the Hollywood Ten

The initial reaction to HUAC's October 1947 investigation of Communists in the film industry was mixed. The hearings, as Document 15 reveals, were tumultuous, and the press seemed equally hostile to both the committee and its unfriendly witnesses. The Hollywood studios' response was muted. Eric Johnston, president of the Motion Picture Association of America and the film industry's official spokesperson, pledged that Hollywood would cooperate with the investigation at the same time as he insisted that there would be no blacklist. But once it was clear that the Ten would be cited for contempt, the situation changed. Meeting in New York at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on November 24–25, 1947, the major producers decided to fire the unfriendly witnesses. Their statement, released publicly on December 3, announced a policy of refusing to hire Communists. The blacklist had begun.

The Waldorf Statement

December 3, 1947

Members of the Association of Motion Picture Producers deplore the action of the ten Hollywood men who have been cited for contempt. We do not desire to prejudge their legal rights, but their actions have been a disservice to their employers and have impaired their usefulness to the industry.

We will 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

The Waldorf Statement, 3 Dec. 1947, in Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980), 445.

is acquitted or has purged himself of contempt and declares under oath that he is not a Communist.

On the broader issues of alleged subversive and disloyal elements in Hollywood, our members are likewise prepared to take positive action.

We will not knowingly employ a Communist or a member of any party or group which advocates the overthrow of the Government of the United States by force or by illegal or unconstitutional methods. In pursuing this policy, we are not going to be swayed by hysteria or intimidation from any source. We are frank to recognize that such a policy involves dangers and risks. There is the danger of hurting innocent people. There is the risk of creating an atmosphere of fear. Creative work at its best cannot be carried on in an atmosphere of fear. We will 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.