Naming Names

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NAVASKY, NAMING NAMES

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The Reasons Considered

MOTIVES, C. WRIGHT MILLS ONCE SUGGESTED, should be analyzed as answers to questions.[1] Did those who defended their naming names really believe in what they did or is it all after-the-fact rationalization? Were they simply turning in others to save themselves?

Abe Polonsky, the blacklisted writer-director, makes the persuasive argument that since the informers didn't turn in names *before* the Committee put pressure on them, we (and in some cases they) can never know whether they acted from noble or ignoble motives. As he says of Kazan, "Kazan was not in the process of going around giving the names of people whom he thought were hostile to the society he had come to love. But the Committee faced him with a problem. Up to that point he didn't have a problem. All he had was a disagreement politically with some people. Since they were old friends they'd have had these arguments for years. I assume they did, you know. After all, Harold Clurman in *The Fervent Years* tells about the arguments they always had, and they disagreed with each other a hundred times.

"This was something else. This was, Who goes to the concentration camp? Do I go with you or do you go by yourself? That was the real decision he had to face at that time. Now the fact that he no longer sympathized with the political point of view he once shared with these people is irrelevant—no one at this late stage in life attacks his right to change his mind. His opinion about that was not the source of his action. The source of his action was something else. And the ability to make that distinction—between his opinions and his source of action—is the ability to discover where the course of morality lay.

"The fact of the matter is, unless Kazan became a stool pigeon or an informer, whichever one he prefers, under no circumstances whatsoever would he have directed a film in the United States."

Polonsky argues that for most of the people who cooperated with

HUAC, it was not a moral, ethical, or political question at all. It was a practical question—but people don't like to think of it that way because it makes their character less worthy. "In most cases the informers picked a route that seemed to them an easy solution to a difficult problem; in other words, they could handle their own friends, whom they testified against, better than they could handle the U.S. government harassing them." Schulberg, according to Polonsky, "just has to explain one thing: Why did he become an informer when they forced him to? And why didn't he become an informer *before* they forced him to? The reason was that before, he thought it wasn't a good thing to do. What made that change happen was a practical situation. The Nazis pointed a gun up against his head and said, 'Look, give us some names,' and he says, 'Yeah, I hate those guys anyway. You know I hate those guys.' And they say, 'Sure, that's why we're here. So give us their names.' And he gave the names. The question to ask is, Why then and not a week before?

"If you wait till they put a gun up against your head, it's too late to claim that you're doing it for moral-political reasons. Time has passed."

Michael Gordon, Lee Cobb, Isobel Lennart, and Sterling Hayden all concede with remorse that their plan was to name their way back to work. But to this day, other informers deny that they were acting with this sort of self-interest. Schulberg says, "believe it or not," he had long ago turned his back on Hollywood. Elia Kazan says that anyone who says he did it for the money is "simplistic." Richard Collins says that at the time he decided to name names all he knew was that that was what Larry Parks had done and Parks had gotten fired. And so on.

But the evidence is the other way. You *knew* if you took the Fifth Amendment you were blacklisted. "Cooperation" at least kept the door open. Besides, after their HUAC testimony Schulberg and Kazan made *On the Waterfront* and *A Face in the Crowd*. Except for Parks and a very few others, the informers went back to work. Even Leo Townsend, who insists he was on a double blacklist and indeed lost the Warner's job he told the Committee he had been promised he could keep, picked up ten credits in the following five years.

However, reading the informers' testimony and listening to them explain themselves, one suspects that the "reasons why" which they now adduce are not mere after-the-fact rationalizations. The reasons they give seem at a minimum to have functioned as before-the-fact moral tranquilizers; an internal equivalent to the Cohens and Gangs, they served to cancel out the basic presumption against informing, to obfuscate the question of betrayal, to overwhelm compunction.

About informer-motives little can be said with certainty other than

that most of them—including those who now profess real regret—insist they were not total sell-outs. Twenty-five years after the fact, each is still careful to delineate where he or she drew the line. As E. E. Cummings put it, " 'There is some s. I will not eat.' "[2] Schulberg didn't name anyone who hadn't been named before. Lennart wouldn't name anyone who hadn't been named at least ten times before. Collins named only the dead, those already called, and those who had quit the Party. Michael Gordon wouldn't name anybody until he was persuaded that the time for symbolic resistance to the Committee had passed and then he insisted on the privacy of his testimony. David Raksin combined his name-naming with a defense of his idealistic reasons for joining the Party in the first place. Clifford Odets lectured the Committee even while he acceded to it. Roy Huggins drew the line at spelling—he would give the names but not the letters. A combination of self-justification and line-drawing apparently freed otherwise honorable people to violate their norms by minimizing damage to their own self-image.

Since motive must remain a mystery, it is all the more important to ask whether the exculpations and justifications—the "reasons why"—can withstand critical scrutiny. The degree to which they cannot—and the evidence of trouble on both the analytic and empirical fronts is considerable—may be the measure by which decent men and women lost touch with their sense of self. Although circumstance varied with individuals, collectively they advanced four different types of explanation for what they did, none of them in the last analysis persuasive, all of them at first blush plausible. Let us examine them one by one.

I Didn't Hurt Anybody. If there is one refrain that keeps asserting itself—almost like a chorus—in the reminiscences and explanations of those who played the informer, it is, "I only named those who were already named." The idea seemed to function as a sort of security blanket not merely for those who now profess shame but also for those who express ambivalence about what they did, as well as those who defend their acting as informer.

Even though spontaneous mention of this argument is often coupled with a disclaimer ("I know that's not the point"), the implication ("I therefore wasn't as cold-blooded as some suspect") is clear. Thus one is astonished to discover that much of the time the claim turns out to be false.*

* I have drawn on the lists of Howard Suber (unpublished) and Robert Vaughn (published) as well as on my own reading of the public testimonies before HUAC in determining when individuals were publicly named for the first time.

Roland Kibbee recalled, "Bill Wheeler contacted me. I told him (a) I had no new names, (b) I couldn't say under oath who was or wasn't a member of the CP, (c) I knew nothing." On further prodding he said, "Whether it was considered cooperative or uncooperative I don't know. . . . I named those who named me. I walked a narrow line. There wasn't a human being in the world I could have exposed." Under oath Kibbee had identified sixteen peers as Party members, plus a Party labor organizer named Luke Hinman whose name had never been publicly mentioned and which he spelled out.

Lee J. Cobb took little solace from the idea, yet thought it worth mentioning, that the Committee representatives said to him, "Any names we already have and have been confirmed and reconfirmed—all you have to do at this point . . . is concur." But he was the only one publicly to name Lloyd Bridges (although Bridges had furnished an executive statement a year and a half before Cobb testified). And he was the first one publicly to identify the actors Ludwig Donath and Shimen Ruskin, and the actresses Rose Hobart and Gerry Schlein.

"By plain good luck I gave them nobody new. I didn't deliver anybody over," Sylvia Richards mentions. And since she is quite open about her belief that she made a mistake in cooperating and would do it differently if she had it to do over, she has no "status incentive" to misrepresent the record. But she was the only witness publicly to identify the writer Lee Gold as a Communist and the only one to mention the writer Tamara Hovey.

The writer-producer Roy Huggins says today, "I ended up agreeing that people who had already been mentioned many times were indeed known to me as Communists. . . . There was literally no one in the Communist Party that I had ever known who hadn't already been publicly listed many, many times." But among those Huggins named who had not previously been publicly identified as Communists were the writer Leslie Edgly; Robert Richards, who he said was the dues secretary of his Party unit; and Elliott Grenard (when asked who was the head of his cell, Huggins said that Grenard was the nominal head at one time or another, though he had "no idea" how the name was spelled).

Isobel Lennart ("My criterion was that I would mention no name that had not been mentioned ten times before—not eight but ten") said she mentioned "about ten to twelve names." As it happened, Miss Lennart, although she named no new ones among the twenty-one people she cited, did name more than half a dozen who had been named less than ten times.

Leo Townsend remembered that "I didn't name anyone that hadn't been named." But of the thirty-seven people he named as Communists, he was the first publicly to mention the director Joseph Losey and his wife Louise Losey, the writer Ben Bengal, the screenwriters Ben and Norma Barzman, the actress Phoebe Brand, the songwriter Jay Gorney, the writer Daniel James, the writer Henry Meyers, the writer Mortimer Offner, the writer Maurice Rapf, the writer Bess Taffel, and the agent John Weber.

The Schulberg correction of the *Times* obituary of Herbert Biberman said: "Biberman, as one of the most outspoken of the original Communist leaders, had been mentioned by many previous witnesses before the Committee. Schulberg simply corroborated a list of names that had already been corroborated many times over." In fact, Budd Schulberg was only the third in a round of witnesses (after Meta Rosenberg and Edward Dmytryk) to identify Herbert Biberman as a Party member—although he had been named as early as 1942 by Rena Vale before the California Committee on Un-American Activities. (After Schulberg, Biberman was named by more than a dozen others.) But Schulberg himself named a dozen other persons as having been in the Party, including the writer Tillie Lerner, whom he was the *only* person publicly to identify.

Even Edward Dmytryk, who had done time as a member of the Hollywood Ten before he changed his mind and testified, responded, "How?" when a television interviewer rhetorically asked whether it wasn't true that those he named had suffered. "They suffered through their careers," said Tristram Powell of the BBC. "Not necessarily," replied Dmytryk. "Not a single person I named hadn't already been named at least a half-dozen times and wasn't already on the blacklist. . . . I don't think I put anybody in trouble because of the names I mentioned because they had all been mentioned before."[3] Well, not quite. He was the first publicly to mention the directors Bernard Vorhaus and Michael Gordon and the writer Maurice Clark, and the only one to mention the writer George Corey (*Mr. Winkle Goes to War* [1944]).

Thus memory is frequently belied by testimony. Moreover, even where the Committee's counsel told a potential informer ahead of time that HUAC already "had" the names, the witness had no knowledge of exactly who had or had not been named or called, and no way of knowing whether his own list would be made public. The Committee had three sources of names: those it heard in public, those it heard in private, and those uncovered by its research but never officially publicized. And because testimony taken privately might be released (or leaked) at the Com-

mittee's discretion, no witness could ever be certain that his own information would not be publicized in a way which might injure one who had or hadn't already been identified publicly.

That naming as Communists people whom the Committee already knew as Communists was *not* harmless or morally neutral seems to have been implicitly understood by many of those who testified. That, presumably, is why Richard Collins telephoned Cleo Trumbo to tell her that although he was going to name names, he would omit Dalton's. "I like Collins," says Bill Wheeler, "but in naming twenty-three names, he lied. He was one of the whip horses in there. He knew about three hundred people, I guess. I got them—I had their names—he gave them to me later. But he didn't want to name them all." Or, for another, there was Budd Schulberg, who, asked by the Committee who had represented him during the period of his break with the Party, was at first reluctant to say, explaining, "My only hesitation—at times through no fault of your own, sir, people read things in the papers and say, 'I saw your name in the paper. You must be in some kind of trouble.' " All of these people understood on some level that the publication of names, even the second and third time around, could have consequences. The writer Abram Ginnes recalls a multiply named friend from television: "Every time he started to work his way back—it was like one of those Mack Sennett comedies, and he'd get hit in the face with another pie."

Each naming went out like a burglar alarm to the free-lance enforcer network, reminding them that there was a subversive to be fired, harassed, or embarrassed, a career to be derailed; reminding his children and their friends that they had a pariah for a parent; reminding neighbors that they had best keep their distance. The enforcers devoured the Committee's annual indexes and supplements, reference manuals such as *Red Channels,* newsletters like *Counterattack,* and columnists like Winchell and Sokolsky. Their appetite for names was insatiable. They may have preferred new names but were content to recycle old ones, so long as they had something to keep in circulation.

Even where no "objective" damage was done, the target didn't always see it that way. When I asked Polonsky, years later, how he felt toward the people who named him he said, "There were too many to count." Told it was less than a dozen, he was genuinely surprised and said, "It seemed like thirty or forty—at least that's the feeling I had when I was out in the rain. It may be that it was just raining in two or three places, but I thought it was raining everywhere."

By not protesting against HUAC's request for names one collaborated in the fiction that the Committee's quest was part of a legislative rather

than a punitive process. Each informer made it that much more difficult for the next witness to resist. And by supplying names one did the Committee's dirty work of advertising its targets. Moreover, virtually every cooperative witness contributed to the corruption of the process by swearing to tell the *whole* truth and then providing only a selective part of it. (The one exception, Martin Berkeley, who named everyone he knew, also corrupted the process by adding to the list some who didn't belong.)

They Deserved What They Got. The obverse of "I didn't hurt anybody" is, "They had it coming to them, they got what they deserved." Essentially the argument is that however evil HUAC was, the Communist Party was worse. To the accusation that he betrayed his former comrades, Kazan makes the point that when he gets around to telling his story he will detail how *they* betrayed *him* eighteen years earlier. Appearing before the Committee, but also writing in the popular magazines of the day and speaking to and through the mass media, many informers by implication justified their cooperation with HUAC by reference to the evil they were exposing. Call it blaming the victim, or the Fallacy of the Greater Evil.

Many Hollywood writers who thought nothing of cranking out formula pictures using recycled plots on pedestrian themes, presented themselves before HUAC as artists shocked by the aesthetic and political demands of Party politics, free spirits mauled by the thought-controllers. Even the talented ones, who had no complaint with Harry Cohn's or Cecil B. De Mille's transformation of art into commerce, complained in the 1950s of the Party's crude attempt to judge their movies or stories by Marxist canons. And then there were serious writers who managed to reconcile themselves to the corruption of the Hollywood system but felt constrained to complain out loud about the corruption of the Party system. To hear them tell it, truth and beauty were the victims and the Party censor, the executioner.

Clifford Odets made it quite clear in his HUAC testimony that he left the Party because he lost his respect for its literary and cultural critics. His evidence: "when my plays came out, they received fantastically bad notices [in the Communist press], although a play like *Waiting for Lefty* was widely used, not only by the Communists but by all liberal organizations and trade-union movements. I not only disagreed with their critical statements of my work, but disagreed with their critical estimates of anybody's work, writers that I didn't know, like Steinbeck and Hemingway."

A close reading of his rowdy testimony (which includes an amusing ac-

count of his Party-sponsored trip to Cuba, some militant talk on where he learned his hatred of poverty, and a self-conscious refusal to kowtow to the Committee's demands that he denounce the Communist Party as a revolutionary organization) reveals that he decided it was "not for me" because he wearied of wasting his time on the literary haggling.[4]

After Odets testified—and named names—he was distressed that his message had been missed; he thought he had showed the Committee "the face of a radical," but nobody he cared about heard anything but the names. A month later he wrote his friend the writer Benjamin Appel:

> For the most part the judgments (so judgmental everyone is!) of what I did and said in Washington have been disgustingly mechanical, based on a few lines printed in newspapers, right or left, when actually there were three hundred pages of typed transcript. Personally I find this a disturbingly immoral time and this immorality exists as much on the left as on the right. Personal clarity, in my opinion, is the first law of the day—that plus a true and real search for personal identity. I don't believe in any party or group doing my thinking or directing for me.[5]

Budd Schulberg's testimony, it may be recalled, had mainly to do with how the Party criticized his short stories as decadent and then tried to get him to rewrite *What Makes Sammy Run?,* his Hollywood novel, as a proletarian novel that satisfied the critical canons of socialist realism and the reigning cultural commissars, John Howard Lawson and V. J. Jerome. As he recalled it for the Committee, "The feeling was that [my book] was a destructive idea; that . . . it was much too individualistic; that it didn't begin to show what were called the progressive forces in Hollywood"—all of which was ironic to Schulberg, who believed that his account of Sammy Glick on the make was the first to tell the story of the Screen Writers Guild from the union's perspective. Although he talked briefly about other reasons for defecting, the thrust of his testimony was that it was the literary roughing-up that caused him to quit the group, pay no more dues, flee Hollywood, leave the Party. Why should such crude commissars have a say about his art?

Edward Dmytryk, his second time around in April 1951, gave the Committee one of the rare examples of Communists actually trying to control the content of a picture (there were less than half a dozen of these; eventually the Committee stopped looking for them) when he told of Communist objections to *Cornered,* which he made with Adrian Scott

in 1945. "This is the thing," he said, "which actually got me out of the Party."

The cartoonist Zachary Schwartz preceded his naming of names in 1953 with an expression of outrage at a lecture the artist Edward Biberman had given on "Marxism and Art":

> I was completely disgusted . . . because it brought me face to face with the demands that I accept ideas that were utterly ridiculous, and that I paint that way or draw that way or think that way. . . . I got into a discussion with the lecturer around the whole idea of what he called the utilitarian aspects of art, and my argument with him was that art in any form—whether it be painting, writing, mosaic—anything creative . . . is a thing of the spirit and you can't control it or handle it the way you would a frying pan and the manufacture of a piece of utilitarian material of that kind.[6]

The journalist Louis Fischer observed that for every Communist who became an ex-Communist there was a single last straw, an event that transformed doubt into decision, that caused him to leave and then oppose the Party.[7] He called these moments "Kronstadts," after the defection from the Bolshevik cause of Alexander Berkman, the anarchist-supporter of the revolution who jumped off the train of history when he was repelled by the bloody Soviet repression of the sailor-rebels at the Kronstadt naval base in 1921. For some it was Kronstadt, for others the purge trials of the late 1930s, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Party Congress denouncing Stalin, the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. For many of the Hollywood ex-Communists—if one trusts their testimony before HUAC—their Kronstadt was, more than anything else, what Kazan called "the disgusting spectacle" of the recantation of Albert Maltz. Indeed, the event took on a symbolic significance that extended well beyond Hollywood. An index of its effect on the liberal left is found in a letter written in 1952 by I. F. Stone, a consistent champion of the rights of cold war victims, to Dashiell Hammett, setting forth his reasons for declining the honor of sponsoring a rally-tribute on behalf of V. J. Jerome, by then one of the sixteen New York Smith Act defendants:

> VJ is a hell of a nice guy personally but politically he has tried to ride herd on the intellectuals in a way most offensive to anyone who believes in intellectual and cultural freedom, as has *New Masses,* often in

> most humiliating ways—as in the belly-crawl forced some years ago on Albert Maltz. I'd feel like a stultified ass to speak at a meeting for Jerome without making clear my own sharp differences with the dogmatic, Talmudic, and dictatorial mentality he represents. I intend to go on defending him as a Smith Act victim but I can't pretend he's a libertarian, so I'd better stay away.[8]

What was this Hollywood Kronstadt, which not only shocked the conscience of civil libertarians such as Stone but also cost the Party some of its best talents? It is worth exploring in detail if for no other reason than because it provided so many ex-Communists with their most vivid grievance, their best argument for revenge against the commissars: It was cited by many witnesses as partial grounds for their cooperation with the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Briefly, the cause of the uproar was four thousand nonrevolutionary words on the subject "What Shall We Ask of Writers?" published in the *New Masses* in February 1946. Maltz carefully mentioned at the outset that he was going to take the assets of the literary left for granted, apologized for what might be too "sweeping" language, and said that he would focus on where things have gone wrong and why.

"The source of the problem," he wrote, "is the vulgarization of the theory of art which lies behind left-wing thinking, namely 'art is a weapon.'" Broadly speaking art *is* a weapon, he observed, but as narrowly applied the emphasis has been too much on the weapon and not enough on the nature of art.

It is wrong, Maltz believed, to judge creative works "*primarily* by their formal ideology," for when you do that you end up with absurdities such as the *New Masses* critic attacking Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* when it was produced as a play in 1940, because its anti-Nazi politics were anathema during the period of the Stalin-Hitler Pact, and then hailing it as a film in 1942 after Hitler's invasion of Russia. You can't, he said, write a novel and an editorial at the same time. John Steinbeck, James T. Farrell, John Galsworthy, and Richard Wright were examples of writers who were ideologically out of step and still functioned as great artists. Engels understood that about Balzac. "Having a tactical ax to grind," he wrote, "usually requires the artificial manipulation of character."[9]

In other words, Maltz spoke uncommon sense. Isidor Schneider, the editor of *New Masses,* who had asked writers to think out loud about the relationship of art to politics, seemed to embrace Maltz's unrevolutionary

views in a companion piece called "Background to Error," where he wrote: "In our day-to-day reviewing we should avoid the mistakes so clearly shown by Maltz. . . . The first confusion has been in elevating political tactics into political principles. . . . The second confusion has been to stretch the artistic evaluation to cover the political evaluation."[10]

And then the rains came. Howard Fast, still a decade away from his own defection from the Party, charged in *New Masses* that Maltz was calling for "the ideology of liquidation." His summary of Maltz's position:

> Art and politics do not mix. Therefore, salvation—and, of course, achievement—for the artist lies only in a separation from the Communist movement, the most highly political of all movements today. No matter how he slices it, embroiders it, or disguises it, that is what Maltz advocates. He advocates, for the artist, retreat. He pleads with him to get out of the arena of life. The fact that life shows, and has shown for a generation now, that such retreat is tantamount to artistic death and personal degradation, cuts no ice with Maltz.[11]

Joseph North wrote that Maltz would chop down "the fruitful tree of Marxism" to cure some weak branches.[12] Alvah Bessie viewed Maltz's basic contentions as "not only un-Marxist, but actually anti-Marxist":

> Perhaps I do Maltz a disservice in thus associating him with Marxism, for he nowhere identifies himself in his article as anything more than "a working writer," whatever that may be. He nowhere states his frame of reference or identifies the point of departure from which he launches what is, objectively, not only an attack on Marxism but a defense of practically every renegade writer of recent years who ever flirted with the working-class movement. . . . No. We need more than "free" artists. We need *Party* artists. We need artists deeply . . . rooted in the working class who realize the truth of Lenin's assertion that the absolute freedom they seek "is nothing but a bourgeois or anarchist phrase. . . ."[13]

Michael Gold, Samuel Sillen (literary editor of the *Daily Worker*), even the new head of the Party, William Z. Foster, all took their turn,[14] and on March 19 John Howard Lawson too found Maltz out of context:

> We cannot divorce the views expressed by Maltz from the historical moment he selects for the presentation of these views. He writes at a

time of decisive struggle. The democratic victories achieved in the Second World War are threatened by the still powerful forces of imperialism and reaction, which are especially strong in the United States. . . . Can we regard it as merely an oversight that Maltz does not say one word about the class struggle? . . .[15]

Indeed, for parochial Party reasons if no others, Maltz had picked a dubious "historical moment" for his reflections. "Had he written it during the United Front days of 1935–39 or in the war years of Soviet-American cooperation, when everybody from Monsignor Fulton Sheen to Captain Eddie Rickenbacker had kind words for the Stalin regime," observed the literary historian Daniel Aaron, "it might have slipped by without official censure. It appeared, however, well after the famous Jacques Duclos letter of May 1945 presaged the end of peaceful collaboration between the United States and the Soviet Union and the bankruptcy of 'Browderism.'" A week before Maltz's article appeared, Browder, once hailed as "the beloved leader of our movement," had been expelled from the Party as a "social imperialist."[16]

Maltz was briefly a pariah. Richard Collins, who was midway on his journey from enforcer of social realism to HUAC informer, recalls the Party meeting called to denounce Maltz. "I noticed, which I probably wouldn't have five years before, that no one was sitting near Albert. So I made a point of sitting down next to him. I felt about the men who were attacking him that some of them were talentless; some of the loudest voices were the least talented. I felt what people must have felt about me before—that it was outrageous and impudent."

The writer Leopold Atlas prefaced his own naming of names before the Un-American Activities Committee with an unforgettable description of the occasion:

> This was truly a ghastly business. Here one saw the wolf pack in full operation, working on one of their own long-term members. The mere recalling of the incident is abhorrent to me. . . .
>
> When I heard of Maltz's article and read it, I was enormously pleased. This was not only a further indication to me that the Communist Political Association had honestly broken with the tenets of the Communist Party, but also that Albert Maltz, after long contemplation, had fought his way clear through to the liberal humanitarian way of thinking and writing.
>
> Albert and I worked at Warner's at the time and I recall going over to his office to congratulate him on the independent position he had taken. . . .
>
> A week later the roof fell in, and that is a very mild way of putting it. By his article, Maltz evidently had been guilty of some great heresy, and the execution squad, shipped in from the East, came marching in . . . the intellectual goon squad.
>
> Knowing that Maltz was in trouble, I was prepared to defend his position, despite the fact that I was sorely aware of my deficiencies as a public speaker.
>
> From this point on I can only give you my impressions of that meeting. It was a nightmarish and shameful experience.
>
> I remember that Albert tried to explain his thoughts on the article. I remember that almost instantly all sorts of howls went up in protest against it. I remember that I and one or two others made small attempts to speak in favor of Maltz, and we were literally shouted down. I think I remember seeing Leonardo Bercovici trying to defend the article. But the wolves were loose and you should have seen them. It was a spectacle for all time. [The writer Arnold] Manoff, from whom I had expected some statements in defense, said nothing.
>
> From one corner Alvah Bessie, with bitter vituperation and venom, rose up and denounced Maltz. From another corner Herbert Biberman rose and spouted elaborate mouthfuls of nothing, his every accent dripping with hatred. Others from every part of the room jumped in on the kill.
>
> Aside from the merits of the article in question, this spectacle was appalling to me, for one simple reason: Maltz, I knew, was an associate of theirs of long standing. He was at that time a person of some literary stature and, as I then believed, a man of considerable personal integrity. The least one might have accorded him, even in disagreement, was some measure of understanding, some measure of consideration. But not they. They worked over him with every verbal fang and claw at their command; every ax and bludgeon, and they had plenty. They evidently were past masters at this sort of intellectual cannibalism.
>
> The meeting was finally adjourned, to be reconvened the next week at the same place. I firmly resolved in heart and mind that if at the next meeting Maltz decided to renounce them all and stick by his guns, I would be the first to follow him out. However, at the next meeting they completely broke him.
>
> The hyena attack—that is the only way I can describe them—continued with a rising snarl of triumph, and made him crawl and recant. This entire episode is an extremely distasteful thing for me to recall.
>
> I remember feeling a deep anguish for him as a human being, that

his closest friends for years, or at least associates, would treat him so shamefully, so uncharitably, so wolfishly. Whatever the cause, his friends had no right, in all decency, to humiliate and break him in this fashion. Or if they did they were not his friends. And whatever they stood for should have been proof eternal to him that they were wrong and evil.

Maltz's martyrdom, if that is what it was, was false, sterile and destructive.

Further, in that hour he betrayed not only himself and his justly derived thoughts but also all those who had entered and remained in the organization, in a large measure, due to him. So long as he was there, one felt some good was there. A sense of justice to which one could always appeal . . .

After this I knew positively that I had to get out. But how, I frankly didn't know. I believe I have already mentioned that they were placed in strategic positions throughout the industry. That withdrawal from them would have meant professional and economic suicide. I had already seen the utterly ruthless, unprincipled, cutthroat act of character assassination they had performed on Albert Maltz and others. . . .

I had two little babies, one newly born and the other a two-year-old child. I had to protect them at whatever cost to myself, though . . . despite all this, I did leave them voluntarily and of my own free will, accepting with certain knowledge retaliatory measures. I could no longer compromise with my principles.[17]

On April 9, 1946, two months after his initial effort, Albert Maltz published a second article in the *New Masses,* this one called "Moving Forward." It retracted the first. After summarizing the criticism of his original piece he said, "I consider now that my article—by what I have come to agree was a one-sided, non-dialectical treatment of complex issues—could not . . . contribute to the development of left-wing criticism and creative writing." He took responsibility for opening the way for the social democratic *New Leader* magazine to seize on his comments to "support its unprincipled slanders against the left." He also pleaded guilty to separating "the organic connection" of art and ideology. And he told those who had read his earlier article with approval that it was revisionist in approach and in it he had ignored "the basic problem of an honest writer in capitalist society."

Then, looking at the bright side of things, he found that "the intense, ardent, and sharp discussion" seemed to have been "a healthy and necessary one," and he sidestepped the harsh tone of some of his critics, saying, "The question is not how fair they were or Howard Fast was, but what was the substance of what he had to say?"[18]

It is this sequence of challenge and Party intervention and submission that has been seized on by embittered ex-Communists to explain their alienation from the Party and, in a number of cases, partially to justify their decision to play the informer.

Since John Howard Lawson lives on as the cruel face of the Party in the testimony of so many Hollywood informers, it seemed worth hearing his side of it. Before he died in 1977, Lawson was an arthritic and heartsick old man who could function only for about fifteen minutes at a time. But in those stretches he seemed to have his total wits about him and made an impressive case for the role he tried to play in his years as cultural honcho of the Hollywood Party.

What about Schulberg's charge that he tried to get *Sammy* to conform to the Party line? What about Lee Cobb's recollection that he tried to reconcile Stanislavski and Marx? Didn't he try to smuggle the Party line into *Blockade* (1938) and give tips to others on how to do it? And, finally, what about his role in the recantation of Albert Maltz?

Lawson's self-image, it quickly became apparent, had little to do with that of cultural functionary-dictator. He saw himself as a 1930s playwright, a 1940s union organizer and screenwriter, and a 1950s cultural scholar and cultural leader of the Party—as ever struggling to work out a satisfactory understanding of the relationship between art and the social forces that helped to shape and were in turn shaped by it.

The first president of the Screen Writers Guild, author of the experimental plays *Marching Song* and *Processional*, the most militant of the Hollywood Ten, Lawson helped organize the First Writers Congress in 1935 and out of that came *Hollywood Quarterly,* which became *Film Quarterly.* A serious scholar of film and theater and sometime hack-contributor to Party journals, he regarded the blacklist as only one part of the McCarthyite program, which he saw as aiming to control America's mass communications through a new and total censorship. He believed that the cultural blacklist involved a basic struggle concerning control of mass media—a struggle that began with the first sound picture and is still going on. "The role of art is too essential to be dismissed (or at least defined) as part of a general struggle of a political or social kind centering around an 'odd' phenomenon called 'McCarthyism.' The technological

revolution has made control of media a burning issue, and we shall all be badly burned if we do not understand its implications."

He believed that the question was not whether Hollywood witnesses before HUAC were great artists but what service did they perform in fighting against thought-control. How one values the social function of the artist helps to determine how one assesses the utility of his action.

"The question of freedom of speech in the motion-picture industry is one with which I had long been concerned. I have always felt there was a struggle against monopolies, and within that framework the whole creative community had to conduct a struggle. The framework is the decline of the arts and the struggle to deal freely with one's material.

"The questions around the blacklist involve the nature of monopoly power. The main issue developed in the Hollywood hearings was the defense of the writers to express their opinions freely—and refuse to cooperate if they wanted to. We were doing a great service, and the film industry is still suffering from the fear of the McCarthy era."

But wasn't it true that he himself was simply one contestant in the fight to control the Communist Party? And didn't he try to smuggle Communist content into his films? Wasn't the reason he criticized Maltz related to Maltz's deviation from the Party line on socialist realism?

"The Maltz discussion," said Lawson, "has been totally misunderstood, in my opinion, because it has been regarded as a dispute about freedom of expression solely, whereas what was involved was a deeper understanding of the nature of the artistic experience. The whole problem of the artist is to deepen and extend and strengthen the character of his work. And this is a very hard undertaking. I have always made my own judgments on my work and not been affected by judgments coming from any political source." When *Processional,* originally produced by the guild in 1935, was revived in 1939, it was violently attacked by the Communist papers as an example of Dada and surrealism. "I can't recall that that had any devastating effect on me." He got a frantic telegram from V. J. Jerome saying the play went against all the principles of socialist realism. Lawson replied, " 'Sorry, I disagree.' Besides, forty people's jobs depended on it, so I let it run." Lawson also remembered the time Michael Gold criticized one of his plays as the work of a "bourgeois Hamlet. . . . I didn't like it, but it wasn't the end of the world."

What about Cobb's charge that he tried to convert the Stanislavski method to Marxism? "I felt that Stanislavski's method was very limited, and I still think that. We have a tendency to idealize Stanislavski in ways that are confusing. We have on the one hand the code of Brecht—his theory of estrangement, sometimes it's called alienation, his theory of jest. At the same time it's true that the best actors have been trained in the Stanislavski method and their training doesn't make a bit of sense for nine out of ten plays they do in the United States. Nobody has tried to examine this contradiction. I've tried and failed."

Originally Lawson believed that film was a "people's art" and as such there could be no permanent interference with it—the technology guaranteed its own ultimate independence. Now he felt this was confused and optimistic. "You can't have people's art under capitalism, you have to take account of the class struggle when analyzing the possibilities of Hollywood."

Maltz never had Lawson's pretensions as a student of Marxist aesthetics, but to understand his role in the *New Masses* dispute one must understand how he got into the Party and why he and so many other decent, intelligent, and socially concerned individuals stayed in. Maltz's extended answer to these questions merits space here not only because of his historic importance but also because, despite his latter-day disillusionment with the Soviet Union, he seems to recapture perfectly the perspective of his cohorts. His involvement started as far back as high school, he told me, when "The stories of the imperialist nature of World War I began to come out—that the munitions makers never bombed each other's plants, that there were secret meetings of capitalists from both sides in Switzerland . . . in which they reached agreements on things. The fact that this was a struggle of capitalism amongst themselves and had nothing to do with making-the-world-safe-for-democracy kind of thing. This began to come out, and I know that also the bloodbath that WWI had been affected me enormously so that my political stand was that of being a pacifist. I didn't want to participate in anything like that, to kill or be killed.

"By the time I was in college, I became very alert to the question of racial discrimination, and I remember one of my first writing attempts . . . had to do with a lynching. I graduated in 1930, that was in New York, Columbia, and I went up to the Yale Drama School for two years. But this was a period in which the most extraordinary people moved left. They may not have stayed too long but it was a period when Edmund Wilson was writing in the *New Republic* that he was a Marxist, and when he and Malcolm Cowley and a whole slew of others signed as supporters for William Z. Foster.

"By the time I came down from Yale, I was already more radicalized and had begun to read *New Masses* and presently came to hear about

German fascism. And one already knew something about Italian fascism. I remember attending a meeting . . . called by, I think, the old John Reed Club in New York and sending telegrams about the Reichstag fire trial and the burning of books in Germany.

"Well, in those years people concerned about the future of the world had a great deal of interest in or excitement about the Soviet Union. What was going on behind the scenes in the Soviet Union in terms of, let's say, deportation of farmers who wouldn't accept collectivization, the imprisonment, starvation, and death—this was hidden. The Soviet Union did a magnificent propaganda job. On the other hand, one heard things that were very exciting to intellectuals—that abortions were free, that divorce and marriage were up to the people to decide, as well as the fact that they had no unemployment and we had tremendous unemployment.

"And then if you began to observe the domestic scene, you found that the Communist movement at that time stood for many good things. It was the Communist movement that was organizing the unemployed. It was the Communist movement that raised the slogan of 'Black and white, unite and fight!' and that spoke out against world racial discrimination. It was the Communist movement that first proposed social security, which became the law of the land. It was the Communist movement that was very important in the organizing of the CIO and the industrial unions.

"And if you furthermore had read in the Marxist classics, you found what I still think to be the noblest set of ideals ever penned by man. The fact that many of them have been so ill-realized in the Soviet Union today didn't matter. But where else in political literature do you find thinkers saying that we were going to end all forms of human exploitation? Wage exploitation, exploitation of women by men (which the lib movement is now playing up but that the Communist movement was fighting then), the exploitation of people of color by white peoples, the exploitation of colonial countries by imperialist countries. And Marx spoke of the fact that socialism will be the kingdom of freedom, where man realizes himself in a way that humankind has never seen before. This was an inspiring body of literature to read.

"And there was another reason why, say, when the [Moscow show] trials came along, there were many like myself who believed that these people must be guilty, because we couldn't conceive that Bolsheviks who had fought together against the tsars and through civil wars would turn on each other and frame each other. This was inconceivable. I wouldn't have framed anybody else I knew. I didn't know anybody who would have framed me. We were starry-eyed and innocent.

"As soon as fascism came up, the other countries like England and France began to play with it; the Soviet Union opposed it. And the Soviet Union was the only friend that Republican Spain had in any consistent way. The nonintervention farce came up and Franklin Roosevelt went along with it. It was the Soviet Union that sent planes to Spain and the Soviet Union that had ships that were sunk in the Mediterranean.

"So the kind of loyalty that I had for the Communist movement when I joined in 1935 was based upon the belief that mankind's future was to be found there. Certainly, millions who joined it the world over, like myself, didn't join it for profit. There was nothing to be gained out of joining it: It could be time-consuming. It could prevent you from reading *x* number of books that you wanted to read or go to *x* number of films because you were doing other things. But there was the belief that you were working with others toward making the world a better place to live in.

"And for that reason one also had, or many had, a disgust of those who were considered to be renegades. We considered that the Isaac Don Levines [anti-Communist journalists] were liars, and of course as you know a great many lies were told about the Soviet Union in the beginning. Walter Lippmann inaugurated his career by exposing them. But that didn't mean that in, say, the 1950s Harrison Salisbury's reporting on the Soviet Union wasn't very accurate. But it permitted—because of the history and because of the hostility of the press in general to the Soviet Union—one to say, well, he's just an enemy.

"Now all of this is background to what happened when I wrote the article I did and got the reaction I did. I had had dissatisfactions in literary matters within the Communist movement all along—not on everything, but things came up. For instance, in 1935 a play I wrote was produced by the Action Theater; *Black Pit* has as its central figure a trade unionist who under pressure becomes an informer for the mine company. Well, the rumor on the left (by the left I mean Communist Party people but also . . . fellow travelers) got started, before the play opened, that I had written a play glorifying the stool pigeon. The psychological basis for the rumor is that Communist intellectuals, I think, at that time tended to be . . . let's say they [saw] a new world was on the horizon and they only wanted to hear things like Odets's "Stormbirds of the working class, awaken!" or however he ended *Waiting for Lefty.* That excited the hell out of them. But this sober picture of a trade unionist under pressure becoming a stool pigeon—which God knows was an omnipresent thing in the trade-union movement at that time and which I had learned about in the minefields of Pennsylvania, where I spent some time—ran against the grain of a certain type of person, so that . . . there was a small controver-

sy over my play. At the trade union, there was a Sunday-night debate in which a number of people took one side of it, and a man called Clarence Hathaway—who had been editor of the *Daily Worker* and was a member then, I guess of the Central Committee, whatever the hell it was—took the stand that the play was absolutely sound and that the trade-union movement had this grave problem of stool pigeons. So I had accumulated dissatisfactions and early signs of discontent. I forget when the theory of socialist realism became full-blown, but I certainly know that by the time 1941 came along I was in a fury about it and was trying to work out an extended answer to it, which I never succeeded in doing because I'm not really a sound theoretical person. I don't have that kind of mind. But there was this earlier intimation of socialist realism coming along, however it was formulated, and I just knew from my own work that it wasn't right, that it was a straitjacket and I didn't like it.

"In this issue of *New Masses* several editors invited open discussion. One of the guys who wrote was a man called Isidor Schneider; he seemed to me an awfully nice man who had run some other sort of invited discussions and that was what prompted my article. My article appeared coincidentally at a time when the Communist movement was in a furor over criticisms of it that had been made by one French Communist, Duclos. And at some Party meeting in New York, I think a man who had been a World War II veteran hero . . . just arbitrarily (or maybe it was not arbitrarily) used my piece as an example from the literary world of discredited Browderism. That caused an immediate onslaught against my article by a series of people—one primarily: a series of articles that appeared in the *Daily Worker,* by Samuel Sillen. Now it was my feeling at that time that Sillen had made certain criticisms of my article that were sound. And I have not, in general . . . been someone who for emotional reasons had always to defend every position they ever took to the death. I'm willing to concede that I am wrong if it's pointed out to me. It doesn't hurt my ego.

"However, beside the intellectual perception that maybe he had made certain sound points, what was much more at issue in the emotional sense was my desire not to be made to become a renegade—my desire not to be expelled from the Party. I considered it to be an honor to be a member of the Party, and by the way I haven't changed my mind about that now. I would not be a member of any Communist Party, because of what life has taught me, and especially the American Communist Party, which in certain things I think is absolutely disgusting. (Its silence, for instance, on Polish anti-Semitism around 1968 which drove Jews out of Poland is, I think, just disgusting. There's no other word for it.)

"But when I look back upon how things were in those years and what the Party stood for in the 1930s and 1940s, without knowing about the Gulag Archipelago (because if I had known that I would never have kept silent myself) . . . it was a matter of my personal integrity to remain a Communist. And when I received the amount of criticism I did and was given the opportunity to reply to it with another article, I know that emotionally I wanted to reply in a way that would keep me in the Communist movement. And I'm sure . . . I could have said many things [in the first article] that I said in the second article, if I had chosen, and I could have reaffirmed certain of the criticisms I made in the first article and said they still held—and I didn't do that. I was in a kind of shell-shocked state. The criticism had been so enormous—I had gotten a tremendous number of letters as well—that I started to think, Well, now, who am I? Nobody stood up for me, with the exception of certain letters I got. But I started to say, Well, Jesus Christ, I must be wrong, I must be mistaken; and I didn't think of myself as a theoretician, you know, who knew the answers to this and that and therefore was willing to say, Well, all right, I'll set up my own party. I wanted to remain a Communist, I didn't want to become a renegade.

"I believe I got a letter from one of the editors, like Isidor Schneider, congratulating me on my article before they printed it. And [the criticism] came like lightning out of the blue sky—I had no knowledge that there was going to be that kind of criticism. If I had known then I would have taken a position on—how shall I say—fundamental principles, such as when I signed a statement in protest of Poland's actions against the Jews in 1968. That was a matter of fundamental principles. . . . But this was an article I had written; it had not been thought out as a matter of fundamental principle where I was saying, No matter what happens, this is where I stand. There's a real difference.

"There were people who spoke out very sharply against my article. Some of them, I think, spoke unjustly and went overboard, but except in one case where I *know* there was some underlying personal malice, in no case was there any personal malice. But remember there was a strong tradition—begun by Lenin, I think, if not earlier by Marx and Engels—of extremely sharp wordings when you were dealing with political matters. And polemics were not gentle. I think these people were reacting sincerely, but that doesn't mean their sincerity had not been given a push by the fact that the top leadership [of the Party] had spoken.

"But you see, nobody was holding any gun to my head to cause me to write that second article. I could have said, 'Screw you,' to all of them and I would have gotten applause from certain magazines and newspa-

pers for what they would have called my brave act, or something. And that would have been just as inaccurate as saying I crawled, which is the way in which my second article has been characterized. Perhaps I won't blame certain people who don't understand the period for using a word like that. That's how they see it. But it was much more profound than that. The easiest thing in the world, you know, was to leave the Communist movement. I remember reading figures that go back to—oh, about the time before I left the movement, that in about twenty years about a million Americans had joined the Communist movement and left it. And at its highest I think the Party was about seventy-five thousand. So it was a very simple thing to leave the Communist movement. All you did was quit. And I stayed at that time because I believed in it as a whole, in what it stood for."

What, then, can be said about the recantation of Albert Maltz? First, it was not merely a case of Communist authoritarians crushing yet another free spirit. There were mixed motives on all sides. Albert Maltz was trying to preserve a dream as well as a status. The American Communist Party was caught between the heritage of World War II US-USSR cooperation and the imperatives of cold war antagonisms. Some of the Marxist aestheticians, undoubtedly sensitive to Party-line directives from New York or farther East, were nevertheless genuinely grappling with the peculiar task of analyzing truth and beauty in a class context. Some writers undoubtedly were doing their best to enhance their self-esteem by establishing their credentials as tough-minded leftists. That libertarian values were not a dominant concern of even the most sensitive artists on the left may be gathered from a *New Masses* symposium published less than a year earlier on the subject, "Should Ezra Pound Be Shot?" (for broadcasting fascist propaganda during wartime). None of the five symposiasts (including a young playwright named Arthur Miller) had said no. Albert Maltz, another symposiast, argued, "It is because he is a poet that he should be hanged, not once, but twice—for treason as a citizen, and for his poet's betrayal of all that is decent in civilization."[19]

Second, it should be noted that HUAC had a bureaucratic stake in publicizing the Maltz episode. At the outset of its inquiries, there had been much hoopla about Communist propaganda in the movies, but all that the Committee had come up with was *Mission to Moscow*, which was written by a non-Communist (Howard Koch) at the request of President Roosevelt, and one-liners like Lela Rogers' story of how her daughter Ginger had refused a role in *Sister Carrie* because it was "open propaganda," or that Lionel Stander had been caught whistling the "Internationale" while waiting for an elevator. Even after Lawson died, and a *New York Times* writer reported that he "used to give his colleagues tips on how to get the Party viewpoint across in his dialogue," Ring Lardner sent a letter to the editor setting the record straight: "Actually he regarded anything of that sort as a puerile approach to the politicization of screenwriting."[20] Undoubtedly some Soviet sympathizers considered it a blow for the cause when Harold Medford (whatever his politics) wrote the line in *Berlin Express* (1948) on the occasion of a Nazi who had escaped the death sentence, "Well, he's been sent to the Russian front, it's the same thing," but even the Committee must have understood that Soviet sympathizers inserted such "messages" in the movies much in the way that the cartoonist Al Hirschfeld puts his Ninas in his drawings for the Sunday *New York Times* Arts and Leisure section—a kick for the cognoscenti, invisible to anybody who is not in on the joke. The few examples of genuine interference had mostly to do with books, not movies.

Comes now the Maltz episode, at last, possible pay dirt. Here was at least an inkling of Communist concern for content, so the Committee kept coming back to it.

Any serious student of Party-line aesthetics knows that for more than a decade before the Maltz episode, leftist literary hacks indulged in crudely violent polemics against their artistic superiors. But to portray Lawson or even the cultural bureaucrat V. J. Jerome as nothing but censors may be to miss their most complicated aspect. Lawson told me, "I thought it was idiotic to talk about realism, for instance in the Soviet Union, where they make a whole issue of socialist realism yet the art they admire is the Russian ballet, which is not realistic at all and which is of an aristocratic origin, obviously." As Lardner pointed out in his letter to the *Times*, Lawson believed in making revolutionary movies, but he didn't think they would come from monkeying with scripts. Rather, he thought that more revolutionary movies would come from the interdependence of form and content and the deeper penetration of human character, especially in neglected sections of the population. To Jerome's younger, less philosophic disciples, Lardner wrote, "his counseling sometimes seemed remote from the immediate struggle." A sort of test case of his *modus operandi* was recorded by Dorothy Jones, who did a study of Lawson's work on the original screenplay for an antiwar and anti-Nazi picture entitled *Four Sons* (1940). Lawson's writing on the film covered the period from January 1939 to March 1940, which was neatly punctuated by the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. She found that "a careful comparison of various stages of script over this period of time shows that

the material prepared prior to the Nazi-Soviet Pact did not differ in any significant respect from versions of the same material prepared three months after the signing of the pact,"[21] suggesting that Lawson-the-scriptwriter was not automatically following the zigzags in the Party line. Even good old reliable V. J. Jerome, who took these matters as seriously as anybody, eventually came to see that his authoritarian style interfered with his efforts at developing a Marxist aesthetic. The only "overt act" mentioned at his trial (he had been indicted under the Smith Act) was a pamphlet he had written called *Grasp the Weapon of Culture.* Although today it seems less calculated to inspire action than somnolence, its message was that cultural activity was an essential phase of the Party's ideological work. But after he was released from prison in 1957, Jerome wrote to Maltz, "In looking back upon the field of my own activity, the cultural field, I can see that where the method was by fiat, the purpose—clarification through discussion—was less than served. 'Long is the way/And hard, that out of hell leads up to light.' "[22]

The recantation of Albert Maltz caused much disillusion, but to draw on it as a justification for informing, one finally concludes, is to misuse a complex episode in the Party's history. It should not be overlooked that the one man who might conceivably have been justified in invoking the logic of they-deserved-it, Albert Maltz himself, went to prison rather than become a cooperator. The Party's humbling of Maltz in 1946 provides no rationale for the naming (and possible betrayal) of former comrades in the 1950s. And resentment against the Party's brutally imposed proletarian aesthetic seems a poor excuse for dignifying the Committee's comic-book aesthetic, and no excuse at all for acceding to its ritualistic requirement of names.

I Wasn't Responsible for My Actions. The third justification is really the defense of helplessness, picturing the informer as the victim of forces beyond his control: not that it was a harmless thing to do or the right thing to do, but the only thing left to do. Such a defense has been offered on behalf of the late writer-director Robert Rossen, who was one of the most talented men in Hollywood (his films included *Body and Soul* [1947], *All the King's Men* [1949], and *The Hustler* [1961]) and one of the more articulate witnesses to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee—both times. (It will be recalled that on the occasion of his second appearance, on May 7, 1953, when he named fifty names, he told the Committee, "I don't think, after two years of thinking, that any one individual can even indulge himself in the luxury of individual morality."[23]*)

Rossen died in 1966; his widow, Sue Rossen, pointed out to me that, "Right from the beginning my husband, who was one of the Hollywood Nineteen first called, wanted to say, 'I'm a member of the Communist Party and fuck you.' Bob told me that in the privacy of the living room, although he was willing to go along with the Ten [in saying nothing]. At that time I was bringing up my kids; I felt he understood it and I didn't. During that time a meeting took place in our house—it was in 1947, after the Nineteen had been subpoenaed but before they appeared—and he came out to the kitchen and said, 'We apparently just can't tell the truth.' The lawyers were trying to protect the Communist Party.

"Bob was informed through Leon Kaplan, an attorney here who looked after his business, that Edward Bennett Williams would be interested in handling his case. Leon led Bob to believe—that Williams could get Bob up there and not have to name names. We went to see two attorneys in Washington. One had plush offices and he was charging seventy-five dollars a minute and he was very formal and proper and distant. Then we went to see Ed Williams, who was in a cubbyhole, informal, sitting there in his shirt-sleeves. He was impressive. I said, 'To use one of Bob's favorite expressions, It's the difference between chicken shit and chicken salad.' Ed thought he could get Bob up there without giving names—at least not in public, but that's not what happened. It ended up with [being a choice between] Bob doing what he did or dying by attrition—because Bob couldn't get a job writing, and in my book if he couldn't write he couldn't live.

"He was totally rejected by everybody. He couldn't even get an offer in New York. He didn't know New York theatrical people that well. He was just boxed in on every side. The idea was to go to New York and pick up a pad and pencil and write, but he couldn't. His handwriting on a page would start out large and end up small and be about the Committee. He was scared about money, terribly frightened.

"I remember his telling me a story about his rabbi. When he was a kid

* In 1953 Rossen had been living in Mexico with a colony of political refugees, and when he was subpoenaed he told his friend the screenwriter John Bright that he was going to challenge the Committee, "just like Dimitroff" challenged the Nazis' attempt to frame him for the Reichstag fire. When Rossen finally named the names, Bright sent him a wire: "How do you spell Dimitroff?" (From Bright interview with author.)

he asked the rabbi, 'When you are starving and you know that all there is to eat is pork and either you eat pork or you will die, what should you do?' And the rabbi said, 'You eat it.' That's the way I felt. It was his life. I made it quite clear I felt he ought to go up there and get it over with.

"In retrospect, he needed me to say, 'Don't do it,' or, 'Do it.' My feelings were the whole thing was ridiculous. You're not hurting anybody by testifying since they already have all the names and you'll be able to work."

The actor Marc Lawrence said, "I came right out of an asylum to testify." Lee Cobb said he was flat on his back and his friends had abandoned him.

Consider the situation of the talented choreographer Jerome Robbins, who had the following demeaning colloquy with Congressman Clyde Doyle of the Committee on May 5, 1953:

> MR. DOYLE: What is it in your conscience, or what was it in your experience, that makes you certainly, one of the top men in your profession, one who has reached the pinnacle in your art, willing to come here, in spite of the fact that you knew some other people, who claim to be artists or authors or musicians, would put you down as a stool pigeon, and voluntarily testify as you have today?
>
> MR. ROBBINS: I've examined myself. I think I made a great mistake before in entering the Communist Party, and I feel that I am doing the right thing as an American.
>
> MR. DOYLE: Well, so do I. Again, I want to compliment you. You are in a wonderful place, through your art, your music, your talent, which God blessed you with, to perhaps be very vigorous and positive in promoting Americanism in contrast to Communism. Let me suggest to you that you use that great talent which God has blessed you with to put into ballet in some way, to put into music in some way, that interpretation.
>
> MR. ROBBINS: Sir, all my works have been acclaimed for its [sic] American quality particularly.
>
> MR. DOYLE: I realize that, but let me urge you to even put more of that in it, where you can appropriately.[24]

Years later, when I asked one of the Hollywood Ten about the rumor, which Robbins now denies, that he testified under threat by the Committee's staff of disclosing intimate details about his sex life, Ring Lardner said, "I don't know whether it's true or not, but if you were Jerry Robbins, wouldn't you like to have people believe that's the reason you did it?"

When Roy Huggins says, "The terror was undoubtedly upon me," referring to his fleeting belief that his only "choice" was to name names or desert his wife, children, and family for a concentration camp; when Lee Cobb says, "I had to be employable again"; when Sylvia Richards says, "My decisions were passive—those of a woman" and describes her intellectual world as bounded by her attorney, her therapist, her boss, and an anti-Communist boyfriend—what all of these people are really saying is that they weren't in charge of themselves. They were billiard balls subject to the forces of history. They had temporarily lost control of their own destiny. They were more acted upon than acting.

It is not only the informers who make this case for themselves. Beatrice Buchman Rosenfeld, whose late husband the writer Sidney Buchman (*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* [1939], *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* [1941]) had refused to name names for the Committee, enjoins, "Don't lump all the informers together. Some had 'good' reasons to inform. Those include one who had lied to the FBI, homosexuals, people who were afraid of deportation, a woman afraid of going to jail because she would be leaving a two-year-old son. . . ." The case for distinguishing among motives seems both compelling and appropriately compassionate. And yet it cannot be forgotten that for each informer there were two resisters, some in virtually identical circumstances, who refused to go along.*

Sidney Buchman himself, for example, having decided not to name names, could have avoided all personal risk by invoking the Fifth Amendment.† Instead, he took the First Amendment and used the occasion to refute testimony by Martin Berkeley that could have gotten his wife subpoenaed and testimony by Edward Dmytryk that could have gotten his friends the Coreys deported. (Dmytryk had placed the Coreys at a Communist Party meeting held at the Buchmans, but Buchman told HUAC: "I haven't the faintest knowledge that Mr. and Mrs. George Corey were ever Communists or, by the way, intended to join. . . . Mr. Corey was a man who worked with me and I knew him at the studio. He became a very good friend. . . . He was often at my house for dinner. . . . There can be any one of several explanations for Mr. Corey's presence.")[25]

* See above, p. ixn.

† Although many of those interviewed believe that Buchman's Columbia employer, Harry Cohn, bribed the Committee to get him off, no evidence has been produced to substantiate this claim.

Undoubtedly the state leaned on some people more than others, and thresholds of pain—moral, physical, and psychological—vary from person to person. But the example of the Hollywood Ten, of Buchman, Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman, Pete Seeger, and others are there to be reckoned with. There is no evidence that the informers as a class were subjected to greater pressures—by the state, vigilantes, or personal problems—than the resisters. Some were under greater strain than others, and perhaps in isolated cases the force of circumstance disqualified traditional norms as a test of personal probity. But as a general proposition the notion that one was more acted upon than acting is either a tautology or a cop-out—akin to the claim by a number of witnesses who told HUAC they had joined the CP in the first place because they had been "duped" and didn't know what they were doing. If people don't take responsibility for their actions, no one else will.

I Was Acting in Obedience to a Higher Loyalty. Two arguments are advanced by those who feel they were obliged for reasons of some sort of higher loyalty to cooperate with the Committee: First, there are those like Huggins who simply felt that he owed it to his family not to go to jail, or as he put it, why "be a hero" for something in which he no longer believed, when he did believe in giving aid and comfort to his wife, two children, and his mother? Why "be a martyr" to the Communist cause when he had abandoned the Communist Party? It's one thing to refuse to cooperate "if you have religion," as Collins said, "but I didn't have it anymore."

But without minimizing the real conflict between duty to loved ones and duty to principle, to cite one's defection from the CP as a reason to testify before the Committee is to miss the point. The principle at stake was not the well-being of the Communist Party but rather the rights of all Americans and the well-being of the First Amendment. If resistance was required, it was not to protect the Communist Party (except insofar as *its* rights were violated) so much as to prevent the abuse of power by the state.

More interesting are those like Elia Kazan, Budd Schulberg, Lee Townsend, and others who have suggested that they had a moral obligation to reveal the dimensions of the Communist evil. None of them professed any enthusiasm for cooperating with the Committee, and in fact Schulberg says that he criticized it. But all of them suggest they acted in response to a higher loyalty. Kazan spelled out some of his thinking on the matter of competing obligations in his 1952 ad. Townsend pins his at-

tion to his research on Soviet treatment of Jews, and emphasized to me that while he thoroughly disliked McCarthyism his higher obligation was to expose Soviet anti-Semitism.

Budd Schulberg, who still gets visibly agitated when he talks about it, has worked out a sort of moral syllogism which suggests that cooperating with HUAC was not merely an option for ex-Communists but a moral duty. To summarize: Anyone complicit in the Soviet death camps had an obligation to expose and denounce them; Schulberg, Ring Lardner, and others who paid dues to the American Communist Party and defended the Soviet Union's internal and external policies were early deniers of and/or apologists for and thereby complicit in the Soviet death camps. Therefore no matter how distasteful the means (including the naming of names before HUAC), there was an obligation to denounce and expose Communism and Communists.

A year after he testified, Schulberg wrote an article for *Saturday Review* called "Collision with the Party Line" in which he elaborated the connection in his mind between the American Party's attempt to interfere with his conception of *Sammy* and the Soviet Union's brutal treatment of writers. He recalled his visit to Russia, how he thrilled at the Meyerhold Theater's revolutionary interpretation of Ostrovsky's *The Forest*, how he talked with Vakhtangov's widow about her husband's theatrical innovations (which explored a middle course between the realism of Stanislavski and the mechanistic approach of Meyerhold), how he visited the young Afinogenov, whose play *Fear* was one of the hits of the season. He recalled hearing Gorky extol socialist realism (not a straitjacket, but a step beyond the traditional bourgeois realism of the great nineteenth-century writers Balzac, Tolstoy, and Stendhal). He heard the novelist Yuri Olesha honestly discuss how the First Five Year Plan failed to inspire him as a literary theme. He heard Bukharin himself praise Boris Pasternak, "Russia's finest living poet," whose avoidance of topical subjects and experimentalism made him anathema to the Party-minded versifiers. Returning from this inspirational experience Schulberg shortly found himself a member of the Young Communists and stayed in the Party until he had his disillusioning experience with *Sammy*.

> I do not think I am indulging in melodramatics if I invoke a comparison between this easy victory over would-be cultural commissars in America and the systematic violence used by actual Soviet commissars on Russian writers who dare assert their independence and individuality. . . .

For a Soviet writer to buck official criticism or to withdraw from the Party is to invite a one-way ticket to the uranium mines. For the American who wishes to regain and reassert his independence the penalties are merely a certain amount of emotional wear-and-tear involved in breaking the quasi-religious grip in which the movement has held him, and the rupture of friendships with a number of people he has been fond of as individuals, who, while kind and well-meaning, do not realize that the collective will of their organization has twisted their original warm-hearted ideals and crippled their sensibilities. . . .

How these intelligent and personally fair-minded gentlemen could show genuine concern for the political harassment of creative writers in the United States and yet blind themselves to the ever-tightening restrictions strangling the creative arts in the Soviet Union is one of those fascinating doublethinks that riddle our time.

Schulberg's view of V. J. Jerome was that if he were in power he would

> righteously murder truth, freedom, and art with exactly that rigidity, fanaticism and "witch-hunting hysteria" he now cries out so righteously against. . . . As a taxpayer I can't help wondering if the expenses of [Jerome's Smith Act] trial could not be better used in the service of free institutions if he were sent on a tour of American writers. Half-an-hour's exposure to this unfortunate man's views of art and politics is guaranteed to convince anyone with literary integrity that in this Pooh-Bah he has met the enemy, the prototype of the authoritarian, that frightening twentieth-century phenomenon—the politician who turns to art as to a hand grenade.

Schulberg saw the *Daily Worker*'s second and antagonistic review of *Sammy* as the same Party line referred to by Mayakovsky in the years before his own plays were banned for their biting criticism of Soviet bureaucracy: "I believe that the best poetic work will be written in accordance with the social command laid down by the Communist International."

Oblivious to the irony of his own recantation before HUAC, Schulberg wrote with insight that the American Communist movement is a reflection of a familiar Soviet literary phenomenon—"the organized attack on books and writers and the stylized recantation that almost invariably follows."

> In 1946, for instance, the Central Committee attacked two of Russia's outstanding writers, the brilliant Zoshchenko and the lyrical poet Akhmatova. . . . Zoshchenko is described in the *Portable Russian Reader* as "Soviet Russia's foremost humorist and probably the best-loved one since Chekhov." But the Central Committee called him a "scum of literature" who "specializes in writing empty, fatuous, vulgar stuff and in preaching a rotten lack of ideas, apoliticalness, designed to lead our youth astray and to poison its consciousness." Anna Akhmatova was branded by [Andrei] Zhdanov, then High Executioner of Soviet Literature, "an out-and-out individualist, a representative of the bourgeois-aristocratic estheticism and decadence whose work could only breed depression and pessimism and a desire to escape into the narrow world of personal emotions, and thus poison the minds of young people."
>
> Thus two of Soviet Russia's most original voices were silenced. There was little subtlety to their choice—either to write the Zoshchenko and Akhmatova way and follow Pilniak, Babel, Terassov-Rodionov, the poet Mandelstam, the leading critic Voronsky, and the others to some dark and dread oblivion, or to write the Central Committee's way, like Simonov, Alexei Tolstoy, Ehrenberg, and other members of the charmed circle of literary millionaires.

He told how his instructor in Russian literature in 1934 was denounced and arrested in 1935 (according to the bulletin of the Russian Literary Fund), and died in Siberian exile for the crime of "failing to fawn over a novel by Fadeiev that enjoyed Kremlin approval." He told how Meyerhold fell into disgrace in 1937 and his theater was "liquidated" for failure to practice socialist realism, and how subsequent to a courageous public speech in 1939, he was arrested and vanished and his name and speech removed from the book of the First Convention of Theatrical Directors where he had given it. He told how Gorky died under mysterious circumstances in 1936. "Indeed, to call a roll of the principal speakers of the First Writers Congress who fired my enthusiasm for Soviet literature in 1934 is to summon up the dead. Gorky, Bukharin, Radek, Babel, Pilniak, I. Kataev, Tretyakov." As Pasternak summed it up in a bitter understatement, Schulberg reported, "Mayakovsky committed suicide and I translate."

He then made clear that while the United States had no Central Committee Directives on art to punish us for the sin of originality,

> In the name of patriotism, powerful pressure groups . . . continue to harass Hollywood with their police-state mentalities and their indiscriminate loyalty probes. As the Hollywood correspondent for *The New York Times* said recently, "Now, perhaps as never before in its recent turbulent history, the creative element in Hollywood is experienc-

ing a form of censorship unparalleled in the experience of the average individual in this country."

He said of course these things shouldn't be compared with what was happening in Russia, but "a healthy body should be able to throw off the disease after a mild attack. . . . We have seen how the same Revolution that promised to make a free man of Isaac Babel in 1917 crushed him under its monolithic weight twenty years later." Schulberg added, "I decline to accept any suppression of creative individuality as a necessary step in the defense of our culture. . . . Art must always wither and die when it comes under the control of any censorship that judges a writer by his willingness to conform." Schulberg identified two ways to respond to the Soviet trauma: either retreat in fear or reassert our commitment to democratic dignity.[26]

These last are extremely high-sounding sentiments and one would have assumed that they constituted a caution against cooperating with the Committee and presumed that naming names was an ultimate indignity. But revisiting the scene of the crime, so to speak, fails to confirm such suppositions.

Inspection of the testimony shows that Leo Townsend devoted only a couple of sentences of his thirty-four-page testimony to the Jews, and Schulberg dwelt mainly upon his literary roughing-up, with only a few paragraphs on how that related to what went on in the Soviet Union—and not even a wrist slap for HUAC. The anti-HUAC coda in Schulberg's *Saturday Review* piece is really not present in his testimony before HUAC. Indeed, he conspicuously bypassed the invitation to denounce HUAC's methods, not to mention its goals. When asked by the Committee why he signed a petition for the abolition of HUAC only two years before, he replied that that didn't mean he was fundamentally against the Committee; the truth was his feelings were not "a hundred to nothing" but "fifty-five or sixty percent in favor or forty or forty-five percent against," and "that day" he had a "definite concern . . . that people should be called in and their political views should be inquired into," although, he added, there was certainly "information about the CP and the CP operation that could be of no value to the American people."

Schulberg also added that he had some personal pique at Dies because when the Dies Committee had come to town in 1940, it refused to return his call. "Wasn't most of this agitation to eliminate this Committee started by Communist groups that realized that sooner or later this Committee would expose some of their machination?" asked Chairman Walter. "Undoubtedly Communists would join for that reason," said Schulberg.

When Congressman Jackson asked whether he advised others to come forward and "make a clean breast of it" before HUAC, Schulberg replied, "Sir, it would be my own personal advice." He added that HUAC should help cooperative witnesses get work. Jackson then asked about resisters to HUAC: "Should the same amnesty be extended to them by industry or by the American people at the box office?" Schulberg's answer: "Frankly, I haven't quite decided that problem myself. I don't feel it is the same as the other. I do feel there is some difference, but I haven't quite made up my own mind. I can understand certain hesitance on the part of the industry and the American people. It is something I would like to think more about."

What we must ask, then, is not whether the deathlist is worse than the blacklist. Of course it was. Of course Stalin's terror, torture, deceptions, paranoia, murders, and gulags were worse than McCarthy's red hunt. The question, though, is whether to fight the deathlist it was necessary to support the blacklist, whether collaboration with the American informer system was the price of fighting the Soviet gulag system.

Whatever the motives of those who say they were fighting "thought control" and Stalinist terror with names, the means chosen were known to be inappropriate. The congressional investigators were seen by center liberals and conservatives, as well as by the hard-core radical left, as careerists who evidenced no serious concern for the victims of Stalinist purges and death camps; they seemed bent more on punishing the Hollywood naifs than on exposing the practitioners of terror. Men like Dies, Thomas, Velde, Nixon, and McCarthy had in common political opportunism and a demagogic capacity to exploit nativism and know-nothing passions.

Moreover, to say as Huggins, Schulberg, and others did, that they saw no "honest" alternative to "taking the Fifth" seems peculiar. The decision not to defy HUAC and risk prison may be defensible, but honesty had nothing to do with it. Virtually all of the cooperative witnesses (except Berkeley) were by their own admission less than honest when it came to naming those they knew in the Party. As a matter of fact, by systematically naming "only those already named," or at any rate naming some but not others, they told less than the whole truth and thereby contributed to the wholesale corruption of the system. The sort of selective "honesty" that justifies stigmatizing some (but not all) others while clearing oneself seems difficult to defend on grounds of a higher political imperative.

Schulberg's question today of the resisters—what have they done lately?—also seems irrelevant to the issue. His own continued involvement in

politics is ample evidence that his social conscience persists; but whether that makes him morally superior to Lillian Hellman, say, whose Committee for Public Justice carries on its battles on the civil-liberties front, or Arthur Miller, who is in the forefront of protests against the mistreatment of writers throughout the world, or Ring Lardner, who joined the fight to abolish HUAC immediately after he was out of prison and trying to go back to work, is questionable. Such exercises in comparative latter-day moral commitment seem futile. Many honest men and women were burned out during the cold war years.

As a theoretical matter, then, the principal justifications won't wash. The "I didn't hurt anybody" argument (a) turns out to be not true, and (b) in any event seems to go more to what lawyers call mitigation of damages than to be a real defense of naming names. Those who insist that their testimony caused no harm are really saying that they did not wish to harm those they named. But if they indeed perceived their cause as just, then they ought to believe that those they named deserved to be harmed. Yet the "just desserts" justification doesn't hold, either. If those they named behaved wickedly in the past, they deserved punishment in the past. A 1950s investigating committee would seem the wrong forum to administer the wrong punishment at the wrong time.

Undoubtedly the pressure of events incited many to act against their better instincts, but to seek exculpation in such pressures begs the question. Again, the "nonresponsibility" argument sounds more like an attempt to earn compassion (in some cases undoubtedly deserved) than to defend a course of action, especially when it is made by people who are patently ashamed—or at least not proud—of their behavior.

Which leaves the "appeal to higher loyalties." Where the "higher loyalty" is asserted to be family support or other personal commitments, one must concede that conflict and pain may have accompanied the choice (although to do so is not, of course, to endorse the ethics of the decision). But where the higher loyalty is asserted to be an ideological imperative and/or a commitment to "truth," the defense seems inadequate not only because so many of the name-namers told less than the whole truth, and because they waited so many years to tell it, but because as many of these people will now freely concede, the congressional committees were obviously an inappropriate forum for the realization of such high ideals.

There was moral myopia on all sides, but one's victim's inability to distinguish right from wrong is not justification for one's own misdeeds.

Moreover, such justifications ignore the political effect of naming names—of confirming who was and who was not active in left-wing politics, of creating a climate of concern and fear. The effect was to create an exact parallel of McCarthyism: namely, the purging of the cultural apparatus of alien forces, just as McCarthyism was the purging of the state apparatus, an exercise in political purification.

Both resisters and informers claim they were acting according to their lights. The difference may be that the former were true to their mistaken convictions, whereas the latter were untrue to their correct ones—they knew better than to condone Stalinism but they also knew better than to cooperate with McCarthyism.