PHOTOPLAY
MAY, 1948 * p. 53

I'm No Communist

by
Humphrey Bogart

AS the guy said to the warden, just before he was hanged: "This will teach me a lesson I'll never forget."

No, sir, I'll never forget the lesson that was taught to me in the year 1947, at Washington, D. C. When I got back to Hollywood, some friends sent me a mounted fish and underneath it was written: "If I hadn't opened my big mouth, I wouldn't be here."

The New York Times, the Herald Tribune and other reputable publications editorially had questioned the House Committee on Un-American Activities, warning that it was infringing on free speech. When a group of us Hollywood actors and actresses said the same thing, the roof fell in on us. In some fashion, I took the brunt of the attack. Suddenly, the plane that had flown us East became "Bogart's plane," carrying "Bogart's group." For once, top billing became embarrassing.

And the names that were called! Bogart, the capitalist, who always had loved his swimming pool, his fine home and all the other Hollywood luxuries, overnight had become Bogart, the Communist! Now there have been instances of miscasting, but this was the silliest. I refused to take it seriously, figuring that nobody else would take it seriously. The public, I figured, knew me and had known me for years. Sure, I had campaigned for FDR, but that had been the extent of my participation in politics. The public, I figured, must be aware of that and must be aware that not only was I completely American, but sincerely grateful for what the American system had allowed me to achieve.

It was in that comfortable frame of mind that I reached New York City. I first learned how wrong I was in my reasoning through a newspaper pal of mine, Ed Sullivan. He and I have been friends for close to twenty years and when we met, at Madison Square Garden during a big charity show, he called me aside and bawled the life out of me. "Stop it, Ed," I told him. "Suppose I have lost a few Republicans—likely as not, I've picked up some Democrats." Sullivan looked at me as if I had two heads. "Look, 'Bogie'," he said, "this is not a question of alienating Republicans or

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Democrats—this is a question of alienating *Americans*. I know you're okay. So do your close friends. But the public is beginning to think you're a Red! Get that through your skull, 'Bogie'."

Me a Red! That was the first inkling I had of what was happening. Impossible though it was to comprehend that anyone could think of me as a Communist, here was an old friend telling me just that. If it had begun and ended there, okay. But it didn't. Letters began to arrive. There were local newspaper stories and word of mouth spreading rumors across the country. Something had to be done quickly. But what?

I was in the position of the witness who suddenly is asked. "Have you stopped beating your wife?" If he answers "Yes" or "No" he is a dead pigeon.

Let me set it down here, that in this crisis, the newspapermen and the radio commentators of the country were standouts. A few of them, polishing apples for managing editors, acted like imbeciles, but the bulk of them went to my defense. My first statement turned the tide. It read:

"I'm about as much in favor of Communism as J. Edgar Hoover. I despise Communism and I believe in our own American brand of democracy. Our planeload of Hollywood performers who flew to Washington came East to fight against what we considered censorship of the movies. The ten men cited for contempt by the House Un-American Activities Committee were not defended by us. We were there solely in the interests of freedom of speech, freedom of the screen and protection of the Bill of Rights. We were not there to defend Communism in Hollywood, or Communism in America. None of us in that plane was anything but an American citizen concerned with a possible threat to his democratic liberties."

We may not have been very smart in the way we did things, may have been dopes in some people's eyes, but we were American dopes! Actors and actresses always go overboard about things. Perhaps that's why we play benefit shows night after night, why we contribute money so freely to causes we believe just and good, why we volunteer our time and services to help sell bonds or just sell America to the rest of the world. So why is it that as loyal American citizens and taxpayers, we shouldn't raise our voices in protest at something we believe to be wrong? It was our belief, and it still is, that the House Committee easily could have identified the very small percentage

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of Communists in Hollywood through the records of the FBI. There was no necessity for the vaudeville show—the Klieg lights, newsreels, coast to coast radio broadcasts—and the dirtying of many good names with no right to speak in their own defense.

WHY single out Hollywood? As Bob Montgomery and Ronald Reagan said, we have a minute percentage of Commies, but they are under control. Why didn't Washington single out the auto industry, or the coal industry or the Newspaper Guild? Why smear Hollywood?

It seems to me that the thing to be kept in mind is this: On the left, in America, we have the Communists, not many, but tightly organized. On the right, we have the bulk of our population, who believe with me, that cures can be effected within the framework of our democracy. In the middle, however, there are a great many Americans, liberal in thought, who are stoned by the unthinking, who don't realize that these liberal-minded folks are pure Americans. Let's realize that these liberals are devoted to our democracy.

Let us trust that what happened to us, in Washington, does not discourage actors and actresses from taking active, constructive interest in our form of government. It would be tragic, if, because circumstantial evidence created the wrong impression at Washington, actors should withdraw to the political sidelines. That would be downright cowardice. So long as we are opposed completely to Communism and do not permit ourselves to be used as dupes by Commie organizations, we can still function as thoughtful American citizens.

In the final analysis, this House Committee probe has had one salutary effect. It cleared the air by indicating what a minute number of Commies there really are in the film industry. Though headlines may have screamed of the Red menace in movies, all the wind and fury actually proved that there's been no Communism injected on America's movie screens.

As I said, I'm no Communist. If you thought so, you were dead wrong. But, brother, in this democracy, no one's going to shoot you for having thought so!

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