EXPOSING

HOLLYWOOD'S RED MENACE

With hearts and checkbooks the stars responded to the call of humanity—but an insidious plot lay hidden behind the campaign!

BY MORTON THOMPSON

ILLUSTRATED BY C. C. BEALL

They harrowed him with tales of misery . . . bled him of a percentage of his weekly pay check

A CHASTENED Hollywood today is recovering from a nightmare which provided the most bitter disillusionment in its history.

For nearly three years numbers of its inhabitants have been systematically plundered. Blackmailed. Made the cats-paw and the tool of Communists in a conspiracy so callous that its full ramifications may never be entirely revealed.

Police and other investigators, some of them volunteers attached to patriotic organizations, have been canvassing the situation for some time. The trail of the Communists was an incredibly devious one. It led from studio to studio, into the very homes of the stars, into their political meetings, their luncheon parties, wherever a Communist could gain a foothold and wherever there was a film notable sympathetic enough to listen.

The investigation wasn't just a political gesture. The investigators weren't out to sling mud, create a sensational story, or persecute decent, hard-working artists whose only crime was

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their desire to help America and give their time and money to relieve the suffering of their fellow humans.

There was, for instance, the group of fifteen outstanding male stars who gathered in the home of one of their number about two years ago to hear a talk by Ernest Hemingway. The celebrated author, fresh from a stay in war-ripped Spain, implored financial aid for the Spanish wounded. Most of the stars who heard his quiet, dramatic recital of war horrors could barely wait until he had finished before they had whipped out checkbooks and begun writing heavy donations. The money was to buy ambulances. They didn't care which side's wounded the ambulances carried. They wanted to buy ambulances. A wounded man to the sympathetic group was a wounded man, no matter what his political sympathies might have been before he was maimed. In that spirit they sent Hemingway away with fifteen thousand dollars. Questionless, Hemingway turned the money over to some group which handled donations of that sort. I wonder how much of it ever found its way to Spain in the way of ambulances? The State Department said recently that little more than ten per cent of American donations to Loyalist Spain ever reached the people for whom they were intended.

THAT'S one side of the picture. Here's another side. This is the case history of a well-known Hollywood actor who contributed money in a drastically different manner. Late in 1937 he was approached by three men. Two were fellow actors. One was a bit player with known Red sympathies.

"We want to talk to you," they said. "We want you to join us."

He laughed. He said he was too old to go around waving a Red flag, and he thought the whole Red business then intriguing Hollywood was just a fad, like badminton or pogo sticks. He said he hadn't much use for parlor pinks.

They started in to work on him. They showed him documents proving that American unemployment was becoming serious. They harrowed him with tales of misery, of oppression, did their best to rock the boat of his patriotic convictions. They pictured to him his country in the grip of munitions makers and war profiteers. They "proved" to him that the menace of Fascism was very real, that his country was being threatened more gravely each succeeding day by Europe's Hitler and Mussolini, that his duty as an American citizen was to join the growing movement combating these menaces by affiliating himself with any of a number of pro-Communist organizations.

He was shaken—weren't the two fellow actors his friends?—but still unconvinced. They began to talk union to him, and open-mindedness, and how labor was settling its problems, and solidarity. It took nearly two weeks of incessant work, on the lot and off, in the Brown Derby, at his home, working in relays, smoothly, subtly and efficiently, and in the end they sold him hook, line and sinker.

He was emotional—but then actors make their livings by portraying emotion—and he wanted to help. He was used to giving charity. He joined the movement, dug down—and gave.

He gave willingly enough, at first. He—and a lot more like him—probably would be paying yet, if the Dies Committee hadn't started its investigation hereabouts—and if Stalin hadn't signed a pact with Hitler.

DOES it all sound fantastic to you? Here's how it was worked. Wherever possible, Communists got converts and sympathizers in the film colony to sign

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pledges. They saw to it that the pledges were kept. Out of the salaries of the unlucky ones, came a certain, set, agreed-upon percentage for the party. Not all the agreements were so bald that the dupe knew his money was going directly into Communist channels. Sometimes the deductions were earmarked for this or that "anti" league, or some patriotic sounding unit with a professed fight against Fascism or Nazi-ism. Whatever the name, the deductions went almost invariably to aid the Communist cause or into the pockets of the solicitors.

In three years Hollywood is credited with contributing more than two million dollars to Communist front organizations.

In many cases investigators know who contributed the money, how it was spent —and how much of it went to line the pockets of some racketeers who worked behind Red Banners to get it.

At the beginning of 1939, Hollywood's devotion to this or that "anti" group began to verge on the hysterical. And around the middle of 1939 the movie colony began to get uneasy about the entire Red business. This particular actor, for instance, decided it would no longer be good for him to be identified with any group suspected of Red leanings. He refused to make any more donations. First they cajoled him. Then they told him he was yellow. Next they appealed to his patriotism—and finally they got down to business and resorted to outright threats. They vowed that he had been contributing to the Communists all along and they simply promised him that unless he continued to contribute they would go to his studio and inform on him.

Anti-Communist sentiment in America had reached feverish dimensions. Studios were jittery over rumors that their actors, directors and writers were hurting business by association with pink causes. When studios get jittery they usually fire first and ask questions afterwards. They don't want national scandals.

So the threat, levelled gun-wise at the actor's head, was a very real one. He mulled it over. He made his decision.

"I'll beat you to the punch," he said. "I'll tell them myself."

He didn't get a chance. He picked a bad time to rebel. His option was coming up. The Red mobsters got two girls and a man to fill his studio with rumors that he was a moral degenerate. The rumor spread as fast as horrified tongues could carry it, spread in a short time to the office of the head of the studio. The actor's fate was decided sixty seconds later. His option wasn't taken up. He was thrown out.

Fortunately he's back at work today. Investigators explained to a producer at another lot what had happened to him. But some of the mud still clings. He'll be years shuddering down the last of that horrible lie.

THAT'S a typical case, and by no means an unusual one. One of the most sickening weapons used by the Communists is their bludgeon for use against individual reputations.

For that reason—and for many others —Hollywood was the most important foothold the Communists could get in all America. Hollywood—where reputations smeared mean careers ruined over night. The Communists found easy pickings in the film capital. Day after day, beginning in the fall of 1936, they enlarged their influence. They were making some members of the film colony do whatever they willed. They

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took one woman writer and forced her to compose for them a propaganda play, made her come to their meetings and read aloud to them what she had written during the past week, and then, in her presence, went over it humiliatingly, line by line, voting changes until it was completely to their liking. She had to do what they wanted. She was afraid not to.

Imagine using a thousand-dollar-a-week writer like that! Imagine them forcing a star to solicit Red handouts—after they had discovered an indiscretion of his and threatened to expose him. They were stopping at nothing, there was nothing too low for them to attempt. Hollywood was the richest gold mine they had ever struck. And they were making Hollywood pay through the nose, because it had wanted to be generous, wanted to do what it could to salve suffering and, ironically, protect America from foreign influence.

THE Communists weren't interested in forming a large organization. Big groups are unwieldy. Oddly, they do not even want to turn out motion pictures which will be Red from start to finish. All they want in this regard is to insert in a picture one significant scene. They hope it'll pass unnoticed. But they figure that somehow the significant scene will stick. That little by little, picture after picture, the propaganda effect will build up until they are ready to make their move. And that move is Revolution. They want to spot men in important places—not many men—but a lot of important positions. Their task in Hollywood composed one of the most delicate and one of the vastest conspiracies the nation has ever known. Walter Winchell has already passed on to Washington documentary evidence proving that thousands of dollars contributed by Hollywood to innocent-sounding organizations eventually wound up in the hands of Communist leaders. Police and other investigatory groups have gone about accumulating evidence of the conspiracy.

Are you wondering who might be the biggest source of their information? In many cases it's the Communists themselves.

Here in Hollywood many of the racketeers had criminal records. Investigators put on a little pressure of their own. In a short time they had Communists spying on Communists. They had Reds reporting to them exactly what went on at meetings, who was present, what new victims had been selected, how the conspiracy was progressing, and who was weakest.

IT is difficult, at this writing, to estimate the enormity to which Hollywood has been subjected, of the grip the Red racketeers had begun to gain on Hollywood's mind, body and purse strings, of the very, very narrow escape one of the nation's most important industries had at a time when depression had fixed things so it could least afford to stand such a blow.

They were out to dominate Hollywood. They wanted a constant supply of sympathetic money. They had the world's richest amusement market almost in their grip and they had bled it pallid and they were bleeding it white. They were conspiring to use the prestige of stars to propagandize and influence the millions of fans who adored those stars; they were conspiring to use writers to inject Red bait into their scripts; directors to give the Red slant; workers to infect whole unions, milking the town, turning it gradually to their purpose—the conversion of Hollywood into

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another Moscow from which they hoped to operate as a Red-dyeing plant to color the entire nation. It was a shrewd conspiracy. It almost worked. It offered everything: popular stars, unending supplies of money, talent and the most effective propagandizing medium in the world.

Their methods toward the last had become openly arrogant. Hollywood is still dazed from the shock. It was a narrow escape. Hollywood has learned a terrible lesson. It'll never need another. Not like this one.

And almost without exception—and unfortunately there were a handful of exceptions—the colony was sincere, wanted to be generous, loved its country, fought to be allowed to help. Stars vied with each other, fell over each other in their zeal once the ball started rolling, once Causes and Movements had become the fashionable and intellectual things to join. And they ended up as victims of one of the most depressing frauds the country has ever known.

The only thing Red about Hollywood today—is its face.

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