

RING LARDNER JR.

Testimony before HUAC

October 30, 1947

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

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

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

Lardner: Mr. Chairman, let me—

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lardner: You might—

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

Lardner: Well—

Chairman: I want to know whether you can answer the question "yes" or "no."

Lardner: If you did, for instance, ask somebody about that you might ask him—

Chairman: Well, now, never mind what we might ask him. We are asking you now, Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

Lardner: But—

Chairman: You are an American—

Lardner: But that is a question—

Chairman: And Americans should not be afraid to answer that.

Lardner: Yes; but I am also concerned as an American with the question of whether this committee has the right to ask me—

Chairman: Well, we have got the right and until you prove that we haven't got the right then you have to answer that question.

Lardner: As I said, if you ask somebody, say, about spiritualism—

Chairman: You are a witness, aren't you? Aren't you a witness?

Lardner: Mr. Chairman—

Chairman: Aren't you a witness here?

Lardner: Yes; I am.

Chairman: All right, then, a congressional committee is asking you: Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild? Now you answer it "yes" or "no."

Lardner: Well, I am saying that in order to answer that—

Chairman: All right, put the next question. Go to the \$64 question.

Lardner: I haven't—

Chairman: Go to the next question.

Stripling: Mr. Lardner, are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

Lardner: Well, I would like to answer that question, too.

Stripling: Mr. Lardner, the charge has been made before this committee that the Screen Writers Guild which, according to the record, you are a member of, whether you admit it or not, has a number of individuals in it who are members of the Communist Party. This committee is seeking to determine the extent of Communist infiltration in the Screen Writers Guild and in other guilds within the motion-picture industry.

Lardner: Yes.

Stripling: And certainly the question of whether or not you are a member of the Communist Party is very pertinent. Now, are you a member or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

Lardner: It seems to me you are trying to discredit the Screen Writers Guild through me and the motion-picture industry through the Screen Writers Guild and our whole practice of freedom of expression.

Stripling: If you and others are members of the Communist Party you are the ones who are discrediting the Screen Writers Guild.

Lardner: I am trying to answer the question by stating first what I feel

about the purpose of the question which, as I say, is to discredit the whole motion-picture industry.

Chairman: You won't say anything first. You are refusing to answer this question.

Lardner: I am saying my understanding is as an American resident—

Chairman: Never mind your understanding. There is a question: Are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

Lardner: I could answer exactly the way you want, Mr. Chairman—

Chairman: No—

Lardner [continuing]: But I think that is a—

Chairman: It is not a question of our wanting you to answer that. It is a very simple question. Anybody would be proud to answer it—any real American would be proud to answer the question, "Are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?"—any real American.

Lardner: It depends on the circumstances. I could answer it, but if I did I would hate myself in the morning.

Chairman: Leave the witness chair.

Lardner: It was a question that would—

Chairman: Leave the witness chair.

Lardner: Because it is a question—

Chairman [pounding gavel]: Leave the witness chair.

Lardner: I think I am leaving by force.

Chairman: Sergeant, take the witness away.

[Applause.]

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"I Have in My Hand . . .": Senator Joseph McCarthy Charges That There Are Communists in the State Department

This document contains the text of Senator Joseph McCarthy's famous speech to the Women's Republican Club of Wheeling, West Virginia, on February 9, 1950. In this version, which McCarthy inserted in the *Congressional Record* on February 20, 1950, he stated that he held in his hand the names of fifty-seven subversives in the State Department; at Wheeling the list reportedly contained 205 names. The significance of the speech, however, is not in its numbers but in the main thrust of its attack: the charge that Communist sympathizers in the State Department had betrayed their country. Like other right-wing Republicans, McCarthy spotlighted the supposed concessions made by the United States to the Soviet Union at the Yalta Conference in 1945 and the "loss" of China to the Communists. Although many of his specific targets were the State Department's China experts such as John Stewart Service, the diplomat who had been implicated in the 1945 *Amerasia* case, McCarthy's real quarry was the Truman administration. As his repeated references to Secretary of State Dean Acheson imply, the Wisconsin senator was accusing the administration of harboring Communist agents at the highest levels.

Such charges may well have been designed to explain to anxious Americans why the United States seemed unable to prevail in the international arena. McCarthy's rhetoric also had a populist strain. His attacks on "the bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths" and "striped pants diplomats with phony British

Senator Joseph McCarthy, speech, *Congressional Record*, Senate, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., 20 Feb. 1950, 1954, 1956-57.

*In memory of Andrea Eagan
(1943–1993)*

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