## Ronald Reagan and Albert Maltz, Testimony before HUAC, 1947

The House Un-American Activities Committee began to investigate charges of alleged Communist influence in the movie industry in the fall of 1947. The hearings attracted an enormous amount of press attention due to the glamour associated with Hollywood celebrities. HUAC began with a group of so-called "friendly" witnesses. They cooperated with the investigation for a variety of reasons, including a desire to settle old political scores. The Committee then moved to the "unfriendly" witnesses. These included some who were or had been members of the Communist Party, but all of whom rejected HUAC's intrusion into their political beliefs.

Ronald Reagan, a friendly witness, was President of the Screen Actors Guild. Albert Maltz, an unfriendly witness, was active in the Screen Writers Guild.

SOURCE: U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Un-American Activities. Hearings (1947).

## Testimony of Ronald Reagan

Mr. Stripling: Are you the president of the guild at the present

time?

Mr. Reagan: Yes, sir....

Mr. Stripling: Have you ever held any other position in the Screen

Actors Guild?

Mr. Reagan: Yes, sir. Just prior to the war I was a member of the

board of directors, and just after the war, prior to my being elected president, I was a member of the

board of directors.

Mr. Stripling: As a member of the board of directors, as president

of the Screen Actors Guild, and as an active member, have you at any time observed or noted within the organization a clique of either Communists or Fascists who were attempting to

exert influence or pressure on the guild?

Well, sir, my testimony must be very similar to that of Mr. Reagan: Mr. [George] Murphy and Mr. [Robert] Montgomery.

There has been a small group within the Screen Actors Guild which has consistently opposed the policy of the guild board and officers of the guild, as evidenced by the vote on various issues. That small clique referred to has been suspected of more or less following the

tactics that we associated with the Communist Party

Would you refer to them as a disruptive influence Mr. Stripling: within the guild?

I would say that at times they have attempted to he a Mr. Reagan:

disruptive influence.

*Mr.Stripling:* You have no knowledge yourself as to whether or

not any of them are members of the Communist

No, sir, I have no investigative force, or anything, Mr. Reagan:

and I do not know.

Has it ever been reported to you that certain members Mr. Stripling:

of the guild were Communists?

Yes, sir, I have heard different discussions and Mr. Reagan:

some of them tagged as Communists.

Mr. Stripling: Would you say that this clique has attempted to

dominate the guild?

Mr. Reagan: Well, sir, by attempting to put over their own particular views on various issues, I guess you would have to say that our side was attempting to dominate, too, because we were fighting just as hard to put over our views, and I think we were proven correct by the figures—Mr. Murphy gave the figures—and those figures were approximately the same, an average of ninety percent or better of the Screen Actors Guild voted in favor of those matters now guild policy.

Mr. Stripling:

Mr. Reagan, there has been testimony to the effect here that numerous Communist-front organizations have been set up in Hollywood. Have you ever been solicited to join any of those organizations or any organization which you considered to be a Communist-front organization?

Mr. Reagan:

Well, sir, I have received literature from an organization called the Committee for a Far-Eastern Democratic Policy. I don't know whether it is Communist or not. I only know that I didn't like their views and as a result I didn't want to have anything to do with them....

Mr. Stripling:

Mr. Reagan, what is your feeling about what steps should be taken to rid the motion-picture industry of any Communist influences?

Mr. Reagan:

Well, sir, ninety-nine percent of us are pretty well aware of what is going on, and I think, within the bounds of our democratic rights and never once stepping over the rights given us by democracy, we have done a pretty good job in our business of keeping those people's activities curtailed. After all, we must recognize them at present as a political party. On that basis we have exposed their lies when we came across them, we have opposed their propaganda, and I can certainly testify that in the case of the Screen Actors Guild we have been eminently successful in preventing them from, with their usual tactics, trying to run a majority of an organization with a wellorganized minority. In opposing those people, the best thing to do is make democracy work. in the Screen Actors Guild we make it work by insuring everyone a vote and by keeping everyone informed. I believe that, as Thomas Jefferson put it, if all the American people know all of the facts they will never make a mistake. Whether the Party should be outlawed, that is a matter for the Government to decide. As a citizen, I would hesitate to see any political party outlawed on the basis of its political ideology. We have spent a hundred and seventy years in this country on the basis that democracy is strong enough to stand up and fight against the inroads of any ideology. However, if it is proven that an organization is an agent of a foreign power, or in any way not a legitimate political party and I think the Government is capable of proving that—then that is another matter. I happen to be very proud of the industry in which I work; I happen to be very proud of the way in which we conducted the fight. I do not believe the Communists have ever at any time been able to use the motion-picture screen as

## TESTIMONY OF ALBERT MALTZ

THE CHAIRMAN. Mr. Maltz, the committee is unanimous in permitting you to read the statement.

Mr. Maltz. Thank you.

I am an American and I believe there is no more proud word in the vocabulary of man. I am a novelist and screen writer and I have produced a certain body of work in the past 15 years. As with any other writer, what I have written has come from the total fabric of my life—my birth in this land, our schools and games, our atmosphere of freedom, our tradition of inquiry, criticism, discussion, tolerance. Whatever I am, America has made me. And I, in turn, possess no loyalty as great as the one I have to this land, to the economic and social welfare of its people, to the perpetuation and development of its democratic way of life.

Now at the age of 39, I am commanded to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. For a full week this committee has encouraged an assortment of well-rehearsed witnesses to testify that I and others are subversive and un-American. It has refused us the opportunity that any pickpocket receives in a magistrate's court—the right to cross-examine these witnesses, to refute their testimony, to reveal their motives, their history, and who, exactly, they are. Furthermore it grants these witnesses congressional immunity so that we may not sue them for libel for their slanders.

I maintain that this is an evil and vicious procedure; that it is legally unjust and morally indecent—and that it places in danger every other American, since if the right of any one citizen can be invaded, then the constitutional guaranties of every other American have been subverted and no one is any longer protected from official tyranny.

What is it about me that this committee wishes to destroy? My writings? Very well, let us refer to them.

My novel, *The Cross and the Arrow*, was issued in a special edition of 140,000 copies by a wartime Government agency, the armed services edition, for American servicemen abroad.

My short stories have been reprinted in over 30 anthologies, by as many American publishers—all subversive, no doubt.

My film, *The Pride of the Marines*, was premiered in 28 cities at Guadal-canal Day banquets under the auspices of the United States Marine Corps.

Another film, *Destination Tokyo*, was premiered aboard a United States submarine and was adopted by the Navy as an official training film.

My short film, *The House I Live In*, was given a special award by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for its contribution to racial tolerance.

My short story, *The Happiest Man on Earth*, won the 1938 O. Henry Memorial Award for the best American short story.

This, then, is the body of work for which this committee urges I be blacklisted in the film industry—and tomorrow, if it has its way in the publishing and magazine fields also.

By cold censorship, if not legislation, I must not be allowed to write. Will this censorship stop with me? Or with the others now singled out for attack? If it requires acceptance of the ideas of this committee to remain immune from the brand of un-Americanism, then who is ultimately safe from this committee except members of the Ku Klux Klan?

Why else does this committee now seek to destroy me and others? Because of our ideas, unquestionably. In 1801, when he was President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

Opinion, and the just maintenance of it, shall never be a crime in my view; nor bring injury to the individual.

But a few years ago, in the course of one of the hearings of this committee, Congressman J. Parnell Thomas said, and I quote from the official transcript:

I just want to say this now, that it seems that the New Deal is working along hand in glove with the Communist Party. The New Deal is either for the Communist Party or it is playing into the hands of the Communist Party.

Very well, then, here is the other reason why I and others have been commanded to appear before this committee—our ideas. In common with many Americans, I supported the New Deal. In common with many Americans I supported, against Mr. Thomas and Mr. Rankin, the anti-lynching bill. I opposed them in my support of OPA controls and emergency veteran housing and a fair employment practices law. I signed petitions for these measures, joined organizations that advocated them, contributed money, sometimes spoke from public platforms, and I will continue to do so. I will take my philosophy from Thomas Payne, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and I will not be dictated to or intimidated by men to whom the Ku Klux Klan, as a matter of committee record, is an acceptable American institution.

I state further that on many questions of public interest my opinions as a citizen have not always been in accord with the opinions of the majority. They are not now nor have my opinions ever been fixed and unchanging, nor are they now fixed and unchangeable; but, right or wrong, I claim and I insist upon my right to think freely and to speak freely; to join the Republican Party or the Communist Party, the Democratic or the Prohibition Party; to publish whatever I please; to fix my mind or change my mind, without dictation from anyone; to offer any criticism I think fitting of any public official or policy; to join whatever organizations I please, no matter what certain legislators may think of them. Above all, I challenge the right of this committee to inquire into my political or religious beliefs, in any manner or degree, and I assent that not the conduct of this committee but its very existence are a subversion of the Bill of Rights.

If I were a spokesman for General Franco, I would not be here today. I would rather be here. I would rather die than be a shabby American, groveling before men whose names are Thomas and Rankin, but who now carry out activities in America like those carried out in Germany by Goebbels and Himmler.

The American people are going to have to choose between the Bill of Rights and the Thomas committee. They cannot have both. One or the other must be abolished in the immediate future.

THE CHAIRMAN. Mr. Stripling (pounding gavel).

Mr. Stripling.

MR. STRIPLING. Mr. Maltz, what is your occupation?

MR. MALTZ. I am a writer.

Mr. Stripling. Are you employed in the motion-picture industry?

MR. MALTZ. I work in various fields of writing and I have sometimes accepted employment in the motion-picture industry.

MR. STRIPLING. Have you written the scripts for a number of pictures?

MR. MALTZ. It is a matter of public record that I have written scripts for certain motion pictures.

Mr. Stripling. Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

THE CHAIRMAN. Louder, Mr. STRIPLING.

MR. STRIPLING. Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

MR. MALTZ. Next you are going to ask me what religious group I belong to.

THE CHAIRMAN. No, no; we are not.

MR. MALTZ. And any such question as that-

THE CHAIRMAN. I know.

MR. MALTZ. Is an obvious attempt to invade my rights under the Constitution.

MR. STRIPLING. Do you object to answering whether or not you are a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

MR. MALTZ. I have not objected to answering that question. On the contrary, I point out that next you are going to ask me whether or not I am a member of a certain religious group and suggest that I be blacklisted from an industry because I am a member of a group you don't like.

(The chairman pounds gavel.)

Mr. Stripling. Mr. Maltz, do you decline to answer the question?

MR. MALTZ. I certainly do not decline to answer the question. I have answered the question.

Mr. Stripling. I repeat, Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

MR. MALTZ. And I repeat my answer, sir, that any such question is an obvious attempt to invade my list of organizations as an American citizen and I would be a shabby American if I didn't answer as I have.

MR. STRIPLING. Mr. Maltz, are you a member of the Communist Party?

MR. MALTZ. Next you are going to ask what my religious beliefs are.

MR. McDowell. That is not answering the question.

MR. MALTZ. And you are going to insist before various members of the industry that since you do not like my religious beliefs I should not work in such industry. Any such question is quite irrelevant.

MR. STRIPLING. I repeat the question. Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

MR. MALTZ. I have answered the question, Mr. Stripling. I am sorry. I want you to know—

Mr. McDowell. I object to that statement.

THE CHAIRMAN. Excuse the witness. No more questions. Typical Communist line....