



**RED STAR OVER  
HOLLYWOOD**

**The Film Colony's  
Long Romance  
with the Left**

**RONALD RADOSH  
ALLIS RADOSH**



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# Red Star over Hollywood

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Long Romance with the Left

Ronald Radosh  
Allis Radosh



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## Preface

HOLLYWOOD POLITICS HAS BECOME THE SUBJECT OF A NATIONAL COMIC monologue. We are amused by actors who toy with political and social ideas, adopting and discarding them with equal caprice and treating them as the intellectual equivalent of fashion statements. It is now *de rigueur* to have not only a special “cause” of one’s own, but even, *à la* Barbra Streisand, a paid full-time political advisor. The political fads that sweep through Tinsel Town involve career far more than conscience.

Looking back at Hollywood fifty years ago, we see something quite different: a life-and-death political drama that placed the film colony at the center of postwar politics. A script of this drama has been created by a generation’s worth of memoirs and histories, as well as films and documentaries. In it, the Communist screenwriters, directors and actors are the heroes—“liberals in a hurry” who knew little about the malignity of Stalinism. The villains in the piece are the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which summoned these good people to name the names of their friends and co-workers; the Hollywood moguls who capitulated to the paranoia sweeping through American life and blacklisted honest idealists; the liberals who turned their backs while this outrage took place; and worst of all, the ex-Communist “friendly witnesses” who cooperated with HUAC, testifying about their experiences in the Party and betraying people they had known for half a lifetime.

As a result of this “scoundrel time,” so the story goes, Hollywood descended from comity to anger; and from a golden age

of socially relevant filmmaking to the escapist and sentimental films of the 1950s and early 1960s. Not only was a great industry wrecked, but even worse, according to this script, the events of that period led America into the “great fear” of McCarthyism and on to Richard Nixon, the Vietnam War and a right-wing takeover by Ronald Reagan (later resurrected by George W. Bush).

This fable of innocence destroyed by malice has acquired an almost irresistible sanctity during half a century of telling and retelling. It has become the consensus view of a troubled time and the story that Hollywood tells itself each night when it goes to sleep.

But is it true?

Our intention is to look once again at what really happened in Hollywood during that fateful episode in our history, and to re-evaluate this legend of good undone by evil. How and why did so many in the film community become enchanted not only with the Left, but with its most totalitarian expression, the American Communist Party? What were their aims and objectives, and how did they set about achieving them? These are questions that have been embargoed for a generation. Until now, the focus of the scores of books, articles, films and plays about the period has been on HUAC and its investigations. We intend to look at the other side of the drama as well, focusing on the specific phenomenon—the Hollywood Party—to which HUAC was the equal and opposite reaction. What did the Communists in the film capital actually do? How did they advance their political agenda and how effective were they? These are important questions that have been drowned out by the sound and fury about the “American Inquisition.”

Beginning with the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, we will trace Hollywood’s fascination with radicalism in the 1930s—when the film industry was growing up and many future Hollywood personalities visited the Soviet Union, saw a future they believed would work everywhere, and returned to make that vision a reality at home. During the Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe, many of those who worked in the film world fell under the influence of such prophets and reacted to the gathering storm by tying their fortunes to those of the political



Left. Hollywood stars, directors and writers came together to create a popular front of liberals and Communists, united by their opposition to the Nazis and their support of the Democrats and Franklin D. Roosevelt. That unity was lost during the years of the Soviet Union's cynical Non-Aggression Pact with Nazi Germany, signed in August 1939. But after Hitler, in June 1941, had invaded the USSR and the Soviets had entered the war, the liberal-Communist alliance was repaired. Once again committed to supporting FDR and defeating the Führer, and promoting themselves as harbingers of history, the Communists achieved even greater influence in the film capital.

After the war had ended and long before HUAC came to town, the growing estrangement between the United States and the Soviet Union terminated the love affair between the Reds and the Hollywood liberals. Some Hollywood personalities, like Olivia de Havilland and Melvyn Douglas, became fed up with the constant intrigues of their old associates and began to see themselves as having been duped by Communists who were always pushing Moscow's interests rather than America's.

By the time HUAC made its first postwar appearance in filmland, not only these liberals (soon to be stigmatized as "Cold War" liberals) but many Communists too had grown disillusioned with the Party and began quietly drifting away. HUAC called for testimony from scores of writers, directors and actors who were widely known in the industry to have been Party members or sympathizers in the 1930s and 1940s. The result of these hearings soon led the studios to dispense with their services and to institute the now-infamous blacklist.

The blacklist has been over for close to fifty years. Yet intellectuals and Hollywood personalities have made sure that it lives on as an object lesson for a new generation. They have refashioned the time of the blacklist into a perverse parody of a golden age. Some contemporary Hollywood personalities try to associate themselves with this dramatic era in an effort to inflate their personae. Actor Sean Penn, for instance, whose father was one of those blacklisted, has tried to argue, when a proposal of his is turned down or a part in a film is given to someone else, that he has been *blacklisted* because of his opposition to the war in Iraq.

And actor/director Tim Robbins, one of the most popular and employable Hollywood stars, complains routinely, when his political opinions are challenged, that he is the victim of a new *blacklist*. It is only a short step from reflexively honoring those actually blacklisted in the past to seeking status as a victim in a fictional blacklist of the present. In both cases, however, there is a denial of reality. That reality is the subject of this book.



## The Romance Begins

WHAT BETTER PLACE FOR THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION'S PROMISE OF A utopian classless society to take hold than in Hollywood, the capital of dreams? And who better to promote this dream than the revolutionary entrepreneur and propagandist Willi Münzenberg? Born in Germany in 1889, he dropped out of school at fifteen to become a barber's apprentice and then a laborer in a shoe factory. Handsome, ambitious and dissatisfied, he drifted to Zurich, Switzerland, where at the age of twenty-one he became involved with the Youth Bureau of the Swiss Social Democratic Party. There he crossed paths with a small group of revolutionaries including Lenin, Trotsky and Karl Radek—men who would lead the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

A born organizer and irresistible public speaker, the charismatic Münzenberg impressed Lenin, who saw a role for him in promoting the new Soviet state. Hardly an intellectual, Münzenberg looked more like the shoemaker he once had been. "One could imagine him," Arthur Koestler wrote, "sitting on a low stool, with a leather apron, driving tacks into an old boot with the energy of a sledge-hammer." A short, squat, heavy-boned man, Münzenberg "gave the impression that bumping against him would be like colliding with a steam-roller."<sup>2</sup>

Believing that it would be difficult to establish Communism in Russia without the support of the European proletariat, Moscow created the Comintern in 1919 to foment world revolution. The Comintern set up Communist parties obedient to Moscow in other countries, trained Communist leaders, and sub-

sidized and coordinated their activities. Lenin requested that Münzenberg become a major player in this effort.

In 1921, when drought inflicted a terrible famine on Russia, Lenin asked Münzenberg to build an international organization to help with relief efforts. Münzenberg created the International Worker Relief and set up offices throughout Europe, where he promoted the politics of the Soviet Union while soliciting aid for its people. Out of these efforts grew a propaganda empire, later referred to as the “Münzenberg Trust,” which eventually included firms that published newspapers, books and journals, and produced avant-garde theater and films.

Münzenberg’s efforts for famine relief were successful in Europe, but even more so in America, where committees known as Friends of Soviet Russia mushroomed and raised large sums from those sympathetic to the Russian Revolution. Münzenberg saw that when people gave to a cause, they became emotionally invested in it. Reframing charity as solidarity could create a potent political result, a lesson he would later use in recruiting fellow travelers and in establishing front groups for the USSR throughout the Western world.<sup>3</sup>

Like Lenin himself, Münzenberg saw the propaganda potential in the new mass medium of film, which he had exploited in his famine relief effort. In 1924 he helped create a film studio in Moscow called Mezhrabpom, also referred to as M-Russ. He also founded the film production company Prometheus, as well as Weltfilm, to distribute the films internationally. Eventually he planned for “film cells of proletarian art” to be set up throughout the capitalist world.<sup>4</sup> He was given the German distribution rights to Sergei Eisenstein’s now-classic film *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which depicted the sailors’ mutiny during the Russian Revolution of 1905. An example of early agit-prop, the film created a sensation in the West and helped establish Münzenberg’s credentials.

As the Comintern’s chief of political propaganda, Münzenberg was convinced that no medium offered better potential for pro-Soviet publicity than the movies.<sup>5</sup> Only a few short years after the founding of the American Communist Party, Münzenberg was teaching Party cadre about the importance of film. “We must

develop the tremendous cultural possibilities of the motion picture in the revolutionary sense,” he explained in an article he wrote for the international movement in the *Daily Worker*. “One of the most pressing tasks confronting Communist Parties on the field of agitation and propaganda is the conquest of this supremely important propaganda weapon, until now the monopoly of the ruling class; we must wrest it from them and turn it against them.”<sup>6</sup> He quoted Lenin’s statement that Communists had to “powerfully develop film production, taking especially the proletarian *kino* [theaters] to the city masses” as well as to the villages. Of all the arts, Lenin admonished, “the motion picture is for us the most important.”<sup>7</sup>

Münzenberg was also among the first Communists to insist that, although Marx claimed the working classes would make the Revolution, their goal would never become a reality unless the intellectuals and artists could be won over for the cause. Even if they were gullible romantics, the Party had to gain the service of writers, artists, journalists and other influential “culture workers.” While Münzenberg did not invent the political category of “fellow travelers” that would have such a portentous afterlife, especially in Hollywood, his contribution was “to mobilize them and put them in the service of the Communists.”<sup>8</sup> These were mainly intellectuals who “without being party members... display active sympathy for Communism and give it moral support.” He saw such individuals as being uniquely able to push the Party’s secret agenda because they appeared to be motivated only by the fight of good against evil, not by ideology. The Revolution needed these non-Communists who would never have considered joining the Party but would unwittingly do its bidding through their activity in front groups. There were always a few secret Communists (called “submarines”) among them pretending to be fellow travelers, because this status would allow them to be more influential and immune to attack.<sup>9</sup>

Münzenberg used the resources of the Münzenberg Trust to create a vast network of what appeared to be independent groups but were actually in service to the Comintern. These fronts, such as the famine relief committees and the antifascist groups of the 1930s, were meant to “ensnare pacifists, moderate socialists, and

liberal intellectuals into the Communist camp.”<sup>10</sup> Münzenberg, as his lifelong partner Babette Gross wrote, called their members “innocents” and referred to the groups he created as “Innocent Clubs.” (Others would later use Lenin’s more cynical term, “useful idiots.”) According to his friend Arthur Koestler, Münzenberg “produced Committees as a conjurer produces rabbits out of his hat.”<sup>11</sup>

Viewed by many as a “Red millionaire,” Münzenberg in truth did not even have a bank account, and he held no shares in the many companies he created for the Communist movement. Yet he had a chauffeur, wore tailored suits, and enjoyed a seemingly bottomless expense account, courtesy of the Comintern.<sup>12</sup>

Münzenberg was a great success during his first trip to the United States, obtaining an entry visa in 1934 after promising to refrain from any overt political activity. Traveling with the British MP Aneurin Bevan, later to be minister of health in the post-World War II Labour government, he drummed up support for the arrested German Communist leader Ernst Thalmann. “The authorities of this ‘country of capitalism,’” Babette Gross noted with astonishment, “put not the slightest obstacle in the way of Münzenberg, the Communist.” He spoke at mass rallies in all the major cities, climaxed by a speech to thousands at Madison Square Garden. This resourceful man succeeded in raising thousands of dollars for his various committees while in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

### The Romance Begins

Münzenberg and his agents, particularly Otto Katz, who would function as international Communism’s ambassador to the film world in the mid-1930s, did not have to start from scratch when they came to Hollywood. The dream of an earthly utopia embodied in the socialist experiment of Russia had already galvanized many who would become leading writers and directors. Among the group of young college students who had visited the revolutionary motherland without any urging from Soviet officials were the future director and writer Joseph Losey; an aspiring documentary filmmaker and writer named Jay Leyda; the future

novelist and screenwriter Budd Schulberg, son of a prominent Hollywood producer; Schulberg's childhood friend, the future writer Maurice Rapf, also the son of a prominent producer; and the future screenwriter Ring Lardner Jr., son of the famous short story writer of the same name. They would remain intertwined in the film world and its politics through the 1950s, but their paths first intersected in the Soviet Union when they visited this mythic homeland of the radical imagination where the future was being born every day, and then returned like explorers of an earlier era to tell others of the fabulous revolutionary riches they had seen.

### Joseph Losey

Joseph Losey would establish himself as a major director with his first feature, *The Boy with the Green Hair* (1948), an allegory about war and intolerance. Soon afterward he was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, where he refused to testify. To avoid the blacklist, he moved to England and continued to work on "message films"—such as *King and Country* (1964), *The Assassination of Trotsky* (1972) and *Monsieur Klein* (1976)—until his death in 1984.

That was the end of a road that began in 1925, when Losey, then sixteen years old, left his home in La Crosse, Wisconsin, entered Dartmouth College, and found his calling when he worked as stage manager and later director for the college's theater group, the Dartmouth Players.<sup>14</sup> After Dartmouth, Losey did a year of graduate study at Harvard, and then decamped to Manhattan with his master's degree and a burning ambition to work in theater. He met a trust-fund baby named John Hammond, who had moved out of his family's East Side mansion and decided to take his name out of the *Social Register*. Hammond, who before long would become America's first impresario of jazz and blues, introduced Losey to various Harlem haunts where they listened to African-American music till early morning. But Hammond's chief contribution, as Losey later acknowledged, was getting him "involved in the earliest stages of my left-wing politics."

In 1931, Hammond made Losey an offer he couldn't refuse:

an all-expenses-paid trip to Europe, starting with a first-class ticket on the ship *Homeric*. For the two idealistic young radicals, it was a glorious and romantic time—"very Scott Fitzgerald," Losey called it. Upon their return, he persuaded Hammond to support him as director of *Little ol' Boy*, a play written for Jed Harris, which New York critics panned as simplistic propaganda. A few years later, Hammond funded Losey's production of *Jaywalker*, a historical drama written by Sinclair Lewis and his brother Lloyd about residents of Kansas who sought to keep slavery out of the state during the Civil War. This play was also trounced by the critics.

Depressed by his theatrical failures and looking for something to hold on to, Losey borrowed five hundred dollars and purchased a third-class steerage ticket to Europe on the *Ile de France*. He felt compelled to visit the Soviet Union, but upon arriving there via Finland, he at first felt "terribly disillusioned." Whereas the famous muckraker Lincoln Steffens had come back from his trip in 1919 and announced, "I have been over to the future and it works," Losey on the other hand said, "I couldn't see evidence of anything much working. I saw extreme poverty, dirt and discomfort, and I didn't see any of the positive things."

Later on, euphoric reports from Russia by journalists like the *New York Times*'s Walter Duranty—who won the Pulitzer Prize for his propagandistic dispatches in 1931 and continued to work as Stalin's favored journalist in Moscow for the rest of his career—led others to believe that things were working gloriously in the USSR and that there was no starvation and no famine. Losey had seen and reported the truth; yet he too became a partisan of the Soviet Union, and even undertook to work as a secret courier for the Communist underground organized by the Comintern.

Why did he distrust his own perception of reality? Because while the Soviet Union may have been a land of poverty and famine, it was also a thrilling new world of artistic experimentation in the Revolution's earliest phases. While Western theater and film depended upon contacts or rich impresarios like John Hammond to fund plays and films, Losey saw the Soviet government sponsoring theater and film, and directors and writers counting among Europe's avant-garde.



Losey met the famous modernist directors Vsevolod Meyerhold and Nikolai Okhlopkov. He attended Meyerhold's drama school and the classes taught by the greatest of Soviet film directors, Sergei Eisenstein. There he met Jay Leyda, a young American filmmaker who had used a grant to travel to the USSR and become Eisenstein's student and protégé. Leyda invited Losey to stay in his apartment on the outskirts of Moscow. On Leyda's recommendation, Losey toured the Ukraine, where in Kharkov and Kiev he spoke to theater collectives under the auspices of the International Revolutionary Theatre, a group that included Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Joris Ivens and Hanns Eisler. Losey admitted that going on a speaking tour with these notable figures was in fact "the ultimate presumption," but in exchange for his services he was "fed with Marx and Trotsky and Engels—even Stalin."

Why did he sing the praises of the new Soviet tyranny? "I was fed up with the life that I had led in the USA," he later explained to Michael Ciment, and "wanted to have a goal." Losey even sought out Politburo member Otto Kuusinen and said that he wanted to participate and do something meaningful, like "lumbering in the forests of Karelia." No doubt laughing inwardly, Kuusinen told Losey, "Don't be a fool," and urged him to go back to the United States and work for the Revolution there.

Returning to America, Losey became involved in New York's left-wing theater scene and joined the Theatre Union. He claimed in interviews fifty years later that he had not been affiliated with any Communist groups at that time; yet the composer Virgil Thomson, who knew him then, told Losey's biographer David Cauté that he saw Losey as a "sour puss like a great many of those Communist boys," who "spoke the lingo" and who "disapproved of everyone... who were not Communists."

*The New Masses*, by then the Communist Party's cultural magazine, reported in February 1938 that Losey had participated in a benefit it had sponsored. An unnamed woman interviewed by Cauté recalled that in 1936, Losey told her that he was a Party member and tried to recruit her. But most telling was Losey's revelation to his wife that in this period, during his European travels, he was working as a courier for the leader of the Ameri-

can Communist underground, the Hungarian-born Comintern representative known as J. Peters.

Peters, whose real name was Jozsef Peter, was not just another Communist. He had been appointed chief of the New York section of the Party in 1930. Sent to Moscow to be trained by the Comintern, he returned to the United States in 1932 and was assigned, as a Comintern document revealed, “to work in the secret apparatus.”<sup>15</sup> The purpose of this underground organization was to ensure the Party’s internal security, including countering police surveillance, exposing infiltrators, and protecting Party records. It also prepared Party members for underground work, and carried out surveillance, infiltration and disruption of rival radical groups, especially those of Trotsky’s American followers.<sup>16</sup> Most important was Peters’ role in putting together espionage networks composed of American government workers who were secretly Party members or willing to engage in espionage for the Soviet government.<sup>17</sup>

Peters not only led the secret apparatus but was in charge of maintaining contact and cooperation with Soviet intelligence. As part of this work, he asked Whittaker Chambers to gather material from secret sources in government, which he would then give to the GRU, the Soviet military intelligence service. Unfortunately, nothing exists to indicate what material Losey carried through Europe on Peters’ behalf. But Peters also served as liaison with the European Communist underground, and hence could have used Losey for numerous jobs. As an obscure college graduate, Losey would have been a perfect secret courier.<sup>18</sup> As his biographer writes, his “lifelong loyalty to Stalinism” was based essentially on a “loyalty to his own youthful commitment.”

### Jay Leyda

Jay Leyda never gained the same notoriety as Joe Losey. To the degree that he is remembered, it is as a man who devoted years to studying the life and work of Herman Melville. The historian Clare Spark has written, “Leyda was such a prodigious Melville researcher that his project to compile a fully revelatory chronology of Melville’s life in documents earned the backing of Harry

Levin, F. O. Matthiessen, and Alfred Kazin,” among other leading American scholars.<sup>19</sup>

But in his prior life, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Leyda had been active in the world of avant-garde film, theater and photography, and a member of the American Communist Party. The FBI had a copy of his Los Angeles membership card for the cultural section of the Party.<sup>20</sup>

Born in Detroit in 1910, Leyda studied photography in high school with Jane Reece, a celebrated member of Alfred Stieglitz’s circle. Like others interested in the arts, Leyda moved to New York City, where in 1933 he informed his friends that he was traveling to Moscow to attend film school there. He explained to one friend that if at least one member of the Workers Film and Photo League, a revolutionary Communist-dominated arts group he had joined, got into the Moscow school, “then we would be a sharp instrument for revolution here.”<sup>21</sup>

Encouraged by his girlfriend, left-wing attorney Carol Weiss King, Leyda made his journey into the future. In a letter to Lincoln Kirstein shortly after his arrival in the USSR, Leyda urged his friend to join him in Moscow as quickly as possible. “There’s enough food and excitement... to make up for *any* lack you may feel,” he wrote. Warning him not to engage in “touristy whine” about unsanitary conditions or a lack of seats on the tram, Leyda acknowledged that Kirstein would find a “kind of cold” in Moscow. He was not referring to the famous Russian winter, but to the “*chistka*,” the beginnings of the great Stalinist purges, which he defined as a “cleaning given by the party members.” The cold wind, Leyda wrote approvingly, blew through “every unit, trust and union,” and every Party member had to rip “open his past and his mind for inspection by both the cleaning commission and his fellow-workers.” Of course, he continued, sitting “in the slippery comfort of America” one might feel “private small doubts about the USSR.” But upon arriving there, “one goes in and looks—and knows that it is working and sure of itself. It’s moving toward what it wants—a classless society developing toward communism.”<sup>22</sup> What the Russian Communists were doing, Leyda wrote in another letter, was “literally making new people, giving them a solid base and a reason for life.”<sup>23</sup>

Leyda left the Soviet Union in 1936, bringing a letter of recommendation from Sergei Eisenstein to Iris Barry, the director of the Museum of Modern Art's film division in New York City. The famed director recommended that Leyda be employed to obtain German and Russian films for MOMA. With such strong support, Leyda was made assistant curator of the museum's film department, where he worked on a history of Soviet cinema. In 1941, Iris Barry asked for his resignation, his history as yet unfinished. Needing funds, Leyda then took a job working for Artkino, the American distributor of Soviet films, which was closely tied to the Soviet government.

While in Russia, Leyda had gravitated toward other young Americans. In addition to providing temporary housing for Joseph Losey, he had also helped arrange and support the trips of other left-wing New Yorkers, especially those involved with the famed Group Theatre. Directed by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford, this radical drama troupe included Stella and Luther Adler, J. Edward Bromberg, Elia Kazan, Sanford Miesner, Clifford Odets and others, many of whom would go to work in Hollywood in the 1940s.

### **Ring Lardner Jr.**

Ring Lardner was one of America's most beloved humorists and writers when he died in 1934 at the age of forty-eight. Until then, all of his three children had always attended only private schools. Now his youngest son, Ring Jr., who was eighteen and had just completed his sophomore year at Princeton, was forced to drop out. To cushion the blow, his mother managed to get five hundred dollars to allow him to travel to Europe before he would have to find a full-time job. He bought steamer passage on the Hamburg-American Line, and arranged with the Soviet tourist bureau, Intourist, to visit the land of revolution for five dollars a day, which covered travel, hotels and meals.

When he arrived in the Soviet Union, Lardner was instantly impressed. Everywhere he saw signs of massive construction, and the people conveyed "hope and optimism." Moreover, he identified the doctrine of Communism with "new, radical trends

in social behavior, sexual relations, and art.” The teenage Lardner was struck most by the swimming arrangements on the banks of the Moscow River. There were four separate, fenced-off beaches—one of which was for both men and women who chose to bathe nude together.

After U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933, Moscow University had established an Anglo-American Institute for English-speaking students. Lardner enrolled in a course called “Crime and Punishment in the Soviet Union.” At the institute, he met two young men from Dartmouth who would end up in Hollywood with him, the writers Budd Schulberg and Maurice Rapf. The three became fast friends.

Lardner found that the Soviets did not exactly appreciate the Americans’ sophomoric college humor. Noticing a wall newspaper on political topics, Lardner and a Canadian friend decided to put up one of their own. It was a formal petition demanding that “double whiskey-and-sodas be served to each student in his bed before breakfast because the menace to student health in having to walk to the dining room on an empty stomach is appalling,” and it also demanded “that the Scottsboro Boys be set free immediately.”

The Russian professor in charge of the dorm took the petition down immediately and summoned Lardner and his friend to his office. In any Soviet institution, he told them, there could be only one paper, “and that is the one that is sanctioned by the authorities.” Moreover, one did not joke about political topics. As for the demand for freeing the Scottsboro Boys—then the major focus of the American Party’s propaganda campaign—the professor asked, “How could we free them here in Russia?”

Lardner’s friend Maurice Rapf, recalling the same incident, said that in the petition Lardner had “attacked the leadership” of the student group “because we were led by Communists” who had forced them to attend Marxist study groups. Lardner, Rapf said, “was the only one who sounded an opposition voice,” and at that point Rapf regarded him “essentially as an anti-Soviet.”<sup>24</sup> What prompted Rapf’s harsh assessment was that as the dialogue on the wall poster developed, Lardner told the Soviet professor that in the United States there was freedom of the press. The

professor replied, "In no country in the world is there more freedom of the press than...in Russia," where the "press belongs to the people." When Lardner explained that their paper was meant as humor and parody, he was told that in the Soviet Union, "humor for the sake of humor" did not exist.

Aside from what in retrospect was a rather mild rebuke by his Soviet overseer, Lardner had a great time consuming caviar and vodka and flirting with girls from Sarah Lawrence College. He also was taken on tours of courtrooms and prisons as part of his sociology course. Here, Lardner learned that "all punishments were designed for re-education and rehabilitation, and in keeping with this principle of Soviet jurisprudence, the maximum prison sentence was ten years, even for murder." As for the death penalty, this was reserved for serious "crimes against the state." Thievery and prostitution still existed as "hangovers" from the old society, he was told, but were on their way out. Most impressive, Lardner heard that unlike the United States, the USSR had no political prisoners. Such "facts" deeply influenced him. Lardner thought that Russia was "already practicing what only the most advanced criminologists in the West were proposing": curing criminality rather than merely punishing it.

Lardner sought to confirm his own impressions by checking with others—older people whom he expected to be wiser and politically more sophisticated. Unfortunately, the man to whom he turned was the *New York Times*'s man in Moscow, Walter Duranty, whom the British writer Malcolm Muggeridge called "the greatest liar of any journalist I have ever met." He was referring to Duranty's now well-known coverup of the Ukrainian famine, in which an estimated six million people died as a result of Stalin's forced collectivization.<sup>25</sup>

After spending an evening with the "charming and erudite" fellow-traveling journalist, Lardner adopted Duranty's view that anything negative said about the Soviet Union was "not to be trusted."

By the time he returned home, Lardner had become radicalized. Through Stanley Walker, the city editor of the *New York Herald-Tribune* and a great admirer of his father, he landed a job as a reporter at another New York newspaper, the *Daily Mirror*.

As the youngest reporter on the staff, he covered suicides, murders, robberies and strikes. This last assignment moved him further to the left, since it brought him into contact with pivotal figures in the newly aroused working class, like the firebrand John L. Lewis and other leaders of the breakaway industrial union, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

In the summer of 1935, Herbert Bayard Swope Sr., the father of Lardner's roommate at Princeton, introduced him to producer David O. Selznick at a party that Swope Sr. was giving at his home in Sands Point on Long Island. A few months later Selznick offered Lardner a job, and the twenty-two-year-old jumped at the chance to go to Hollywood, following "some of the most important writers in the New York newspaper world [who] had already made the leap."<sup>26</sup> Lardner was assigned to the publicity department and soon began to work with Budd Schulberg on doctoring already developed scripts.<sup>27</sup> While they were working on *A Star Is Born*, Budd, who had joined the recently organized Hollywood branch of the Communist Party, recruited his friend. According to Lardner, it took Budd just five minutes to accomplish his goal.<sup>28</sup>

### **Maurice Rapf and Budd Schulberg**

Unlike Losey and Lardner, Maurice Rapf and Budd Schulberg were born into Hollywood's royalty. Rapf was the son of the prominent MGM producer Harry Rapf. When the new film company MGM was created in 1924, it was Louis B. Mayer, Harry Rapf and the young Irving Thalberg who built it and also created the Loews Theater chain.<sup>29</sup> Budd Schulberg, who grew up one block away from Rapf, was the son of B. P. Schulberg, the head of production at Paramount Pictures. They first met at age eleven and started to do everything together. While other kids their age were playing sandlot baseball, Rapf and Schulberg spent their free weekends on the MGM back lot playing with costumes and props gathered from the prop department. If *Ben-Hur* was being filmed, they used Roman helmets and breastplates; when it was *The Big Parade*, a war film, they borrowed soldiers' bayonets. They would spend their entire day playing on the film sets.

The Malibu Beach film colony in which they lived was a small, privileged world. Schulberg captured the atmosphere in this vivid description: "With a tennis court adjoining our house and with the Pacific for a swimming pool, with track meets, ball games and boxing matches, Grauman's openings, Trocadero floor shows, dances at the Grove, symphonies under the stars, and barbecue beach parties under the moon, with the children of famous stars, directors and producers for playmates, ours was not exactly a proletarian or Marxist background."

Returning from Dartmouth during his 1933 summer vacation, however, Schulberg noted how world events such as the waterfront strike, bank failures, breadlines, apple vendors, the National Recovery Administration and the Reichstag fire had intruded even into this charmed world. He and his friends talked incessantly about Hitler, anti-Semitism and the threat of war. "We were afraid of Adolf and the munitions makers," he recalled.<sup>30</sup>

Like most college students at the time, Schulberg and Rapf, who was at Dartmouth with him, were anxious for peace and initially found themselves attracted to isolationists and even the America First movement. But Rapf happened to study the Soviet Union in some courses where the Soviet "experiment" was generally treated favorably. Dropping by the student activities building one day during his junior year, he saw a notice announcing a three-month trip to the USSR during the 1934 summer break. It was organized by the National Student League, a group he described as an official "communist youth organization," and the cost was \$325. The two young men decided to enroll. Rapf's parents initially objected, but Maurice's arguments about the chance to see the Moscow Art Theatre, then considered one of the most exciting in the world, swayed them.

The trip was perhaps the first educational exchange program in which American undergraduates studied in Russia. Rapf, however, understood its purpose: "converting U.S. youth to a pro-Communist point of view."<sup>31</sup> He and Schulberg joined the forty-five other American, Canadian and Chinese students at the Anglo-American Institute in Moscow, where they lived in a palace formerly occupied by Russian royalty. Rapf, conscious of his Jewish heritage, was responsive to the myth that the Soviets had



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