

HUAC Hearings on Communist Infiltration of the Motion-Picture Industry, 1947

[Hon. J. Parnell Thomas (chairman) presiding]

The committee is well aware of the magnitude of the subject which it is investigating. The motion-picture business represents an investment of billions of dollars. It represents employment for thousands of workers, ranging from unskilled laborers to high-salaried actors and executives. And even more important, the motion-picture industry represents what is probably the largest single vehicle of entertainment for the American public--over 85,000,000 persons attend the movies each week.

However, it is the very magnitude of the scope of the motion-picture industry which makes this investigation so necessary. We all recognize, certainly, the tremendous effect which moving pictures have on their mass audiences, far removed from the Hollywood sets. We all recognize that what the citizen sees and hears in his neighborhood movie house carries a powerful impact on his thoughts and behavior.

With such vast influence over the lives of American citizens as the motion-picture industry exerts, it is not unnatural--in fact, it is very logical--that subversive and undemocratic forces should attempt to use this medium for un-American purposes....

HUAC Hearings on Communist Infiltration of the Motion-Picture Industry, 1951-52

Testimony of Larry Parks, Accompanied by His Counsel, Louis Mandel, 1951

MR. TAVENNER. (HUAC Counsel) Mr. Parks, when and where were you born?

MR. PARKS. I was born in Kansas on a farm. I moved when I was quite small to Illinois. I attended the high school in Joliet, Ill., and I also attended and graduated from the University of Illinois, where I majored in chemistry and minored in physics. I sometimes wonder how I got in my present line of work....

MR. TAVENNER. Now, what is your present occupation?

MR. PARKS. Actor....

MR. TAVENNER. You understand that we desire to learn the true extent, past and present, of Communist infiltration into the theater field in Hollywood, and the committee asks your cooperation in developing such information. There has been considerable testimony taken before this committee regarding a number of organizations in Hollywood, such as the Actors' Laboratory; Actors' Laboratory Theater; Associated Film Audiences-Hollywood Branch; Citizens' Committee for Motion-Picture Strikers; Film Audiences for Democracy or Associated Film Audiences; Hollywood Anti-Nazi League or Hollywood League Against Nazism; Hollywood Independent Citizens' Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions; Hollywood League for Democratic Action; Hollywood Motion-Picture Democratic Committee; Hollywood Peace Forum; Hollywood Theater Alliance; Hollywood Writers' Mobilization; Motion Picture Artists' Committee; People's Educational Center, Los Angeles; Mooney Defense Committee- Hollywood Unit; Progressive Citizens of America; Hollywood Committee of the

Arts, Sciences, and Professions; Council of the PCA; Southern California Chapter of the PCA; Workers School of Los Angeles.

Have you been connected or affiliated in any way with any of those organizations?

MR. PARKS. I have....

MR. TAVENNER. Will you tell the committee whether or not in your experience in Hollywood and as a member of these organizations to which you have testified there were to your knowledge Communists in these various organizations which I have referred to, particularly those that you were a member of?

MR. PARKS. I think I can say "Yes" to that.

MR. TAVENNER. Well, who were these Communists?

MR. PARKS. There were people in the Actors' Lab, for instance--this, in my opinion, was not a Communist organization in any sense of the word. As in any organization, it has all colors of political philosophy....

MR. TAVENNER. Well, were there Communists attached to these other organizations which you say you were a member of?

MR. PARKS. This I'm not familiar with. I don't know. I don't know who else was a member of them besides myself.

MR. TAVENNER. Your answer is because you do not recall who were members of these other organizations?

MR. PARKS. I think that is the gist of my answer; yes.....

MR. TAVENNER. Well, what was your opportunity to know and to observe the fact that there were Communists in [the Actors' Laboratory]?

MR. PARKS. May I answer this fully and in my own way?

MR. TAVENNER. I would like for you to....

MR. PARKS. I am not a communist. I would like to point out that in my opinion there is a great difference between--and not a subtle difference--between being a Communist, a member of the Communist Party, say in 1941, 10 years ago, and being a Communist in 1951. To my mind this is a great difference and not a subtle one....

As I say, I am not a Communist. I was a member of the Communist Party when I was a much younger man, 10 years ago. I was a member of the Communist Party....

Being a member of the Communist Party fulfilled certain needs of a young man that was liberal in thought, idealistic, who was for the underprivileged, the underdog. I felt that it fulfilled these particular needs. I think that being a Communist in 1951 in this particular situation is an entirely different kettle of fish when this is a great power that is trying to take over the world. This is the difference....

MR. TAVENNER. In other words, you didn't realize that the purpose and object of the Communist Party was to take over segments of the world in 1941, but you do realize that that is true in 1951? Is that the point you are making?

MR. PARKS. Well, I would like to say this: That this is in no way an apology for anything that I have done, you see, because I feel I have done nothing wrong ever. Question of judgment? This is debatable. I feel that as far as I am concerned that in 1941, as far as I knew it, the purposes as I knew them fulfilled...certain idealism, certain being for the underdog, which I am today this very minute....

I wasn't particularly interested in it after I did become a member. I attended very few meetings, and I drifted away from it the same way that...I drifted into it....To the best of my recollection, I petered out about the latter part of 1944 or 1945....

REPRESENTATIVE CHARLES E. POTTER (HUAC Committee Member). Who would call these meetings together?....

MR. PARKS. I would prefer not to mention names under these circumstances....

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN S. WOOD (HUAC COMMITTEE chairman). Mr. Parks, in what way do you feel it would be injurious, then, to them to divulge their identities, when you expressed the opinion that at no time did they do wrong?

MR. PARKS. This brings up many questions on a personal basis, Mr. Congressman, as an actor....One of the reasons is that as an actor my activity is dependent a great deal on the public. To be called before this committee at your request has a certain inference, a certain innuendo that you are not loyal to this country. This is not true. I am speaking for myself. This is not true. But the inference and the innuendo is there as far as the public is concerned....

MR. WOOD. Don't you feel the public is entitled to know about [communist infiltration of the motion picture industry]?

MR. PARKS. I certainly do, and I am opening myself wide open to any question that you can ask me. I will answer as honestly as I know how. And at this particular time, as I say, the industry is--it's like taking a pot shot at a wounded animal, because the industry is not in as good a shape today as it has been, economically I'm speaking. It has been pretty tough on it. And, as I say, this is a great industry, and I don't say this only because it has been kind to me. It has a very important job to do to entertain people, in certain respects to call attention to certain evils, but mainly to entertain, and in this I feel that they have done a great job. Always when our country has needed help, the industry has been in the forefront of that help....

On the question of naming names, it is my honest opinion that the few people that I could name, these names would not be of service to the committee at all. I am sure that you know who they are. These people I feel honestly are like myself, and I feel I have done nothing wrong. Question of judgment? Yes, perhaps. And I also feel that this is not--to be asked to name names like this is not--in the way of American justice as we know it, that we as Americans have all been brought up, that it is a bad thing to force a man to do this. I have been brought up that way. I am sure all of you have.

And it seems to me that this is not the American way of doing things--to force a man who is under oath and who has opened himself as wide as possible to the committee--and it hasn't been easy to do this--to force a man to do this is not American justice....

My people have a long heritage in this country. They fought in the Revolutionary War to make this country, to create this Government, of which this committee is a part....

I don't think I would be here today if I weren't a star, because you know as well as I, even better, that I know nothing that I believe would be of great service to this country. I think my career has been ruined because of this, and I would appreciate not having to--don't present me with the choice of either being in contempt of this committee and going to jail or forcing me to really crawl through the mud to be an informer, for what purpose? I don't think this is a choice at all. I don't think this is

really sportsmanlike. I don't think this is American. I don't think this is American justice. I think to do something like this is more akin to what happened under Hitler, and what is happening in Russia today.

I don't think this is American justice for an innocent mistake in judgment, if it was that, with the intention behind it only of making this country a better place in which to live. I think it is not befitting for this committee to force me to make this kind of choice....

SOURCES:

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/huac_infiltration.cfm

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/huac_infiltration2.cfm