

► *High ideals and low I.Q.'s made possible  
Stalin's profitable putsch in movieland.*

## REVOLUTION CAME TO HOLLYWOOD

BY WILLIAM BLEDSOE

NOTHING since the advent of the talkies struck Hollywood quite so hard as the news of the Soviet-Nazi pacts. Mingled with cries of pain were the strains of a big belly laugh. Certain glamour boys and girls, famous writers and directors were on their knees at the shrine of the crossed hammer-and-sickle when the bombshell fell. It hit them like a dropped option. They were still staggering when the Red invasion of Poland exploded around their ears, and the panic was completed by Russia's assault on Finland. Only in the breasts of the most devout can traces of the Stalinist faith still linger. It may still be alive in Lionel Stander, Frances Farmer, Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker, Donald Ogden Stewart, Gale Sondergaard, Lief Erikson, J. Edward Bromberg, Sylvia Sidney, Ella Winter, and a few others—but by the time these words reach print even they may be among the apostates. The fact is that the Hollywood Revolution is fading out. The goofiest era in cinema legend—a com-

pound of high ideals and low I.Q.'s; party lines and just parties; noble slogans and ignoble political rackets—is about washed up. Before it goes down the drain, a respectful obituary over the remains is in order.

I saw the Celluloid Uprising in its most fantastic hours. During the heyday of the Diamond-Studded Proletariat I was editor of the *Screen Guild Magazine*, official organ of the Screen Actors Guild, the AFL union of picture players, which gave me a front-row seat on the super-Revolution. I witnessed the revolt of the Hollywood wage slaves and the Stalin *putsch*. I saw Social Consciousness quicken and come to a boil in actors, writers, and directors whose names rival Rinso and Camels as household words. I followed the insurrection mass meeting by mass meeting, cocktail party by cocktail party, until many a Big Name was more or less secretly enrolled in the Communist Party or tagging along solemnly in one of the “front” leagues and committees. The politi-

cal pig-Latin of class struggle, anti-fascism, and revolutionary tactics rippled around swimming pools and across dance floors. Five-thousand-dollar-a-week proletarians rattled their gold chains of servitude as Russia, Spain, the sharecroppers, China, and the *New Masses* were saved anew and defended once more.

To understand how the Revolution overwhelmed Hollywood, you must know that nearly every high-priced actor, writer, and director detests his work. They hate to make pictures, considering it below their potentialities as creative artists — birds snared in gilded contracts dreaming of literature and real theatres beyond the horizons. To be sure, there are exceptions. A few realize they have hit their stride and are resigned to luxurious slavery. A handful actually enjoy their work. Paul Muni is one; Edward Arnold another — and the comrades hated them like poison. But on the whole Hollywood is a city of unhappy successful people. And that, it seemed to me, was the basis for communism with two butlers and a swimming pool.

The Communist Party traded on this emotional stew, and cashed in big. As long as communism was revolutionary, it could not touch these disturbed souls. But in 1936,

having become “democratic,” Jeffersonian, and respectable, caviar-communism offered a Reason for Living and an alibi for living so absurdly well.

Cramped, unhappy, hamstrung actors and writers and directors thumbed their noses at the half-literate movie moguls whom they despised and hit the sawdust trail to the Kremlin. For the first time in their lives they found salvation. A lot of frustrated, unrealistic, naïve, sometimes not overly intelligent people looking for something to hold onto were sucked into a political racket.

Moscow agents stumbled on Hollywood about the middle of 1936, and found it colossal: Big Names with magical propaganda-carrying power. Barrels of money. The “educational” power inherent in motion pictures; one revolutionary sequence, a few inches of the Party line in the dialogue, a friendly salute to the Kremlin Führer in a picture going to every civilized people on the globe. The publicity value of stars to dress up money-raising enterprises. . . . Only Hollywood could provide such opportunities. Only one thing surprised the pioneering communists prospecting in them thar Beverly Hills: the speed and size and ease of their strikes.

## II

In the studio labor organizations, the comrades had only mixed success. The painters' union went over to the side of the Revolution, body and brushes. Among the talent groups, the Screen Writers' Guild, over the dead bodies of a few anti-Stalinists ("fascists" in the fashionable pig-Latin), sold out to the New Gospel of the United Front. The Guild had been started honestly with the notion that writers have a right to bargain collectively. But the Stalinists stole the show. The Authors' League of America, parent body of the Guild, tried to fight them off, under the valorous captaincy of Miss Luise Sillcox, but lost when the Coast revolutionaries and their hangers-on won local autonomy for the Guild.

This victory almost killed the Guild, but things were patched up and enough passengers were corralled on the communist train to keep things going. Comrade Donald Ogden Stewart, an overnight convert, donated his wit to this struggle for a "progressive" line of action and was ably aided by a supporting cast that included Dudley Nichols, Dorothy Parker, Frances Hackett, Humphrey Cobb, Dalton Trumbo, Phillip Dunne, Irwin

Shaw, Tess Slesinger, Sam Ornitz, Frank Scully, Oliver H. P. Garrett, Lillian Hellman, Boris Ingster, Buddy Schulberg, John Howard Lawson, Lester Cole, Joel Sayre, and Madeline Ruthven. Some of these, of course, hadn't been shown the script and doubtless are still innocent.

It was an altogether different story in the Screen Actors Guild, largest of the talent organizations and now a powerful trade union. There was a strong nucleus of Party stooges and fellow-travelers in this union, but they checked their revolutionary reins. The organization was shaky at the time, the producers were trying to kill it off, and the communists apparently decided to go easy rather than destroy an organization that would some day be highly useful. This is not to say that Guild members like Lionel Stander, Fred Keating, Gale Sondergaard, Melvyn Douglas, Fredric March, Franchot Tone, Victor Kilian, Russell Hicks, Sylvia Sidney, Frances Farmer, Lief Erikson, Helen Gahagan, and their worshipping satellites in the extra and bit-player ranks did not use the Guild for Stalinism whenever safely possible. Their big objective in the early days was to get their representatives elected to the Board of Directors, in which they failed.

When Melvyn Douglas ran against Ralph Morgan for the presidency, he was licked five to one — probably a good measure of the relative strength of the Stalinists at the time.

They did gain a Pyrrhic victory in 1937, when the Screen Actors Guild tied up with the Federation of Motion Picture Crafts dominated by the communistic painters' union. Unfortunately for everyone concerned, this merely started a chain of events that led the Guild straight into the paws of the redoubtable Willie Bioff, now big in the news thanks to Westbrook Pegler's crusading disclosures about his criminal past. Last summer the Guild finally shook off Bioff, but some of those who aided the original sell-out to Bioff's stagehands' union are still on the Guild payroll.

The unionist phase, however, was only part of the larger picture. If the comrades did not get far with the actors' union, they had a loud, romantic, and exciting time pushing the Revolution elsewhere. Actors, writers, directors and Hollywoodians on the fringes of the movie business joined Party "fractions" which met in Beverly Hills, Bel Air and Brentwood underground cells to hear the Party line and rehearse the dialog for the next general meeting. There was

scarcely a Hollywood political, trade-union, or social meeting that did not have a few well-coached communist plants in the audience to heckle the "reactionary" speaker, to see that the voice of the Party was adequately heard and the customary resolutions on Spain, China, and fascism introduced. Hundreds of the Hollywood talent crowd enrolled in formal study classes where Party teachers gave instruction in the Stalinist parody of Karl Marx and Lenin. Marxist jargon filled the air, and experts on dialog became experts on dialectics. Glamour-girls burgeoned forth as authorities on Revolutionary Theory and Practice.

It was fun for an unregenerate infidel like myself to watch the new evangelism. A few became so fiery in their missionary zeal that the Party itself had to crack down on making speeches between takes on the set! The hocus-pocus of fake "Party names" was used extensively. Those in one unit seldom knew for sure who belonged to the others, though they recognized one another by the patter. Life was good now. The reactionary Hollywood of fun, gayety, sex, and divorce, the carefree and glamorous life among the stars — all this was dead. Social Purpose burned in the hearts of hundreds of happy con-

verts. Hollywood was reborn. And the shekels rolled in a steady flood into the manifold Party receptacles.

Screenwriter Mary C. McCall, Jr. epitomized the New Hollywood in the February 1937 issue of the *Screen Guild Magazine* and the article set the town on fire. She wrote in part:

We're up to our neck in politics and morality now. Nobody goes to anybody's house any more to sit and talk and have fun. There's a master of ceremonies and a collection basket, because there are no gatherings now except for a Good Cause. We have almost no time to be actors and writers these days. We're committee members and collectors and organizers and audiences for orators. Either we're standing in the lobby of the Filmarte or the Grand International, keeping tab on the suspect eight hundred who go to see foreign films, or we're giving a cocktail party at which everyone pledges himself to do or not to do something.

Our jobs are rapidly becoming a kind of hobby, like tambour work. There's nothing pulse-quickenning about playing that scene on the fire escape, or getting around the necessity for a dissolve in the hay-loft sequence. When the director yells 'Cut' for the last time, or the clock creeps around to five-thirty, then life begins. Then we can listen to speeches and sign pledges, and feel that warming glow which comes from being packed in close with a lot of people who agree with you — a mild hypnotism, and exhilarating pleasurable hysteria.

The comrades raised hell. A delegation called on the Guild Board of Directors, demanded a retraction

in the next issue and denounced the editor for publishing an article with "anti-trade-union implications." The fact that Miss McCall was one of the staunchest trade-unionists in the Screen Writers' Guild was overlooked. Letters by the dozen protesting the "fascist" article poured in. Long telegrams arrived, sprinkled with the tell-tale fellow-traveller phraseology, bearing many signatures. Emergency "fraction" meetings were called. Miss McCall had started something by saying aloud what everyone knew anyhow.

Donald Ogden Stewart got the job of blistering Miss McCall, and his 3000-word defense of the New Hollywood appeared in the next issue of the Guild magazine. It flamed with indignation and contempt for Miss McCall's indifference to the threat of world fascism. The writer or actor who didn't get in on the Hollywood political fray and pitch was as low as Judas, he rebuked. Comrade Stewart took sharp issue with the McCall picture of everybody involved in politics and social morality. He wrote:

During the past year, I have attended practically all of the "radical" meetings, symposia and benefits (as Howard Emmett Rogers and his followers in the M-G-M branch of the DAR will be glad to tell you at the drop of an

American Legion button) and I can assure Miss McCall that 99 44/100 per cent of Hollywood is still sleeping peacefully in its options. . . . The progress of Nazism and fascism across the face of Europe has not been exactly in the interests of the working class. The Hollywood artist, or the Hollywood workman, whether he wishes or not, has a very practical interest in certain political trends of the modern world and Miss McCall's expressed desire to confine her activities to "setting down what she sees" is pitifully ostrich-like in its failure to envision what would happen to her both as an artist and as a human being if war or fascism should ever come to this country.

Nobody noticed that Stewart somehow overlooked the issue of the artist's and writer's freedom in the Soviet way of life; everybody thought he had done a swell job of getting the Revolution on its way again. But next month I stirred up another counter-revolution by running a piece by Joseph Wood Krutch called "A Plague on Both Your Houses." Mr. Krutch mentioned the purge trials then current in Moscow and suggested that the American way of life is opposed to *both* communism and fascism. The Hollywood branch of the Kremlin fumed again. This second insult to political decency was too much for Comrade Fred Keating who was on the magazine advisory committee. He resigned in a heat.

Every issue of the magazine was judged severely at the "fraction"

meetings on how much "Party stuff" appeared. As Guild members the Hollywood Comrades had access to its pages and often succeeded in putting across articles written or signed by glamorous comrades of the proper political complexion. Mr. Keating scored a hit with his piece "Are We Laborers?" He proved brilliantly that the \$2000-a-week actor or writer, precisely like the truck-driver, is a proletarian slave writhing in the chains of capitalism. This was a favorite theme. In a world filled with sharecroppers and refugees, it was balm for the conscience to feel — even amidst cloying luxury — authentically among the lowly and exploited who tomorrow would inherit the earth and socialize the studios. Frank Scully (*Fun in Bed* and *More Fun in Bed*) propounded the question "Is the Middle Class in the Middle?" and decided that "If the middle class wants to get rid of its white collar of servitude, it had better get its picket lines in order."

### III

But the decisive battles of the Hollywood Revolution were fought in the living arena of mass meetings, boycotts, benefits, leagues, committees, congresses, conventions,

speeches, relief money, telegrams, protests, pamphlets, parades, picket lines, pictures, parties, politics, pledges, petitions, dinners, dances, slogans, and all the rest of the effects that made up the united-front show. "Stop Fascism," "Boycott Japan," "Save Spain," "Save China," "Peace," "Democracy" were strident battle cries to stir thousands of well-meaning and easy-going movie folk into joining "front" organizations like the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and the Motion Picture Artists' Committee. More important, they stirred thousands to donate large sums to causes for which no genuine accounting was ever made; to play sucker for \$20-a-plate dinners (white tie) for returned heroes of the Spanish War or exiled German authors; to feed collection baskets at cocktail parties. This was what made the Hollywood Revolution exciting. The costumed fairyland existence on the sound-stages was balanced by the flesh-and-blood life of hysterical mass meetings, ticket selling, money raising, membership drives, and midnight soirees in magnificent hilltop hideouts. Fans and autograph hounds in the know didn't waste time hanging around the Brown Derby or the Trocadero. The real pickings were at the mass meetings in the Shrine

and Philharmonic Auditoriums and the Hollywood Legion Stadium.

A ten- and twenty-dollar a plate dinner in honor of a revolutionary hero was always sure-fire. You could dress up and be sure to see everybody. One of the brightest of these little affairs was held at that proletarian dive, the Vendome, in honor of André Malraux. M. Malraux' speech on the defense of democracy in Spain was followed by a war film. The final shot showed a mass of Spanish peasants standing on a hillside, arms outstretched, fists clinched, eyes uplifted, chorusing the *Internationale*. Hell broke loose at the Vendome. Napkins and bread filled the air, glasses rang out, wild applause shook the rafters, groups intoned the Moscow anthem, and the full-dress, bare-back Hollywood workers luxuriated in that deep peace that comes with the quickening of social consciousness. Peace, it's wonderful.

Frank Morgan, in a weak moment, was persuaded to throw a dinner party by the Motion Picture Artists' Committee to raise money for ambulances for Spain. Plates were laid for twenty-four hand-picked picture moguls, actors, writers, and directors. Most of them thought it was going to be the usual social evening in a private home and were a little shocked

when, after cigars and brandy, a professional money-raiser showed up. Before they got away, each "guest" wrote a check for \$1000. One ambulance was actually purchased, and typical Hollywood fanfare marked its departure for a publicity run across the country; top-flight stars were on hand to write their magic autographs on its sides.

Director Frank Tuttle turned over the gymnasium on his proletarian estate in Hollywood Hills for a private preview of a "documentary" film on the Spanish war. Upton Sinclair was a principal speaker. A few of the more thin-skinned future fighters on the barricades did not sit through the gore and horror, but most remained to hear a \$2000-a-week writer solemnly announce his determination to quit his job and join the International Brigade. This was a soul-filling moment, and the revolutionaries filed out in a hush, by the tiled swimming pool, called for their limousines, snuggled under their fur robes and rode swiftly toward their mansions, uplifted.

The mass meeting was a type of revolutionary action suited to Hollywood. Grand spectacle, the strained moment, the surging of emotion, the triumphant collection — scarcely a week passed with-

out a gathering in the largest halls, where sordid realities and divorce complications could be forgotten in the utopian whirl. The technique of more private parties was also profitable to the Revolution: the quiet afternoon cocktail party for a select and well-heeled few, hat-passing in big evening brawls, and intimate, almost-clandestine, soirees where plans were hatched.

The united-front organizations, of course, are not a special Hollywood invention. They prospered throughout our broad and innocent land. But the plethora of celebrities in the movie capital made the task easier for the promoters. The League for Peace and Democracy had one of its most vociferous branches here. There was the Congress of Western Writers flourished, with the fellow-travelers setting the tone. (At one meeting this congress protested against a chapter by Eugene Lyons in a book not yet published, on the ground that nothing he wrote on Russia could be credited. The book appeared. Lyons' chapter, alas, was on Persia.) Donald Ogden Stewart was president of Hollywood's most active united-front gag, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League. The League was amazingly successful in concealing its link with the Los Angeles chapter of the American



League for Peace and Democracy, and thus enrolled hundreds who would have been frightened away by the more frankly Stalinist mother-league.

When the author of a letter to the Hollywood *Citizen-News* asked why the Anti-Nazi League did not come out against the Russian dictatorship as well as the German, the League replied through the same medium that the Soviet was a "democratic" nation with a constitution not unlike our own and that whereas Germany was imperialistic, Russia was peace-loving, a protector of small nations and a pillar of the League of Nations. The League could boast Big Names and made good use of them. Mostly, of course, they didn't and still don't understand how they were used.

The Motion Picture Artists' Committee (later revised to the Motion Picture Committee for Democracy) concentrated on the plight of Spain, but never noticed what the Cheka was doing to wreck the Loyalist cause. After Franco won, it took on China. Its roster counted. Luise Rainer, Franchot Tone, Melvyn Douglas, Anna

May Wong, Fredric March, Frances Farmer, and others. Charles A. Page, now lieutenant governor of California, was then generally considered the Party's liaison man with the Committee. It specialized in promoting fund-raising parties and dances. According to a good source, more than \$5000 filled the collection baskets the night it booked Ernest Hemingway in person with his film *The Spanish Earth*. The comfortable revolutionaries always went in strong for horror from abroad, good crying acts, and mass emotionalism of other types.

But the Revolution is ended. Its remnants are disheartened; worse, they are apologetic. And it's a pity, too. For Hollywood was spiritually replete. A precious something has been taken from these people, who now go back sadly to their jeweled emptiness and the drabness of mere wealth. What Stalin is doing to Finland is nothing compared to what he has done to the innocent, high-pitched, hypnotic faith of Hollywood. For once the city faced Reality, and it turns out to be just another piece of make-believe.



► *In close-up: Lord Halifax, Sir Samuel Hoare, Sir John Simon, Winston Churchill:*

## MEN WHO RULE BRITAIN

BY ALFRED DUFF COOPER

*Former First Lord of the British Admiralty*

DURING the international crisis of 1938 which culminated at Munich, there occurred inside the ranks of the British Cabinet a not unnatural development. In times of stress, events move rapidly, and decisions must be taken from hour to hour. A committee of twenty-two is too large and cumbersome a body to deal efficiently with a continually changing situation. Twenty-two men take time to summon, and when collected together take time to decide, if each is to be given a fair opportunity to speak his opinion and to argue a case. The tendency, therefore, at such times, is to delegate supreme authority to a smaller body, who become the real executive and who keep in touch with their colleagues, reporting to them all decisions and obtaining subsequent approval.

In Great Britain, this small executive body became known as the Big Four, and the members of it, besides the Prime Minister, whom I discussed in the January *MERCURY*, were Lord Halifax, the For-

eign Secretary; Sir Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary; and Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Lord Halifax, youngest of the three, being now 58 years of age, has had a career of great distinction. In private life he has excelled both as a scholar and a sportsman, being a fellow of All Souls College at Oxford, and a Master of Hounds. His father, who died recently at the age of 95, was famous in England as the most distinguished lay member of the High Church, and had often been suspected of leanings toward Rome.

His son inherited all his religious convictions, and when he went to India as Viceroy, produced a profound effect on native opinion by altering the whole of his itinerary on arrival because he refused to travel on a Sunday. The Indians, deeply religious themselves, were surprised to find that some Englishmen also had such scruples, and the genuinely friendly relations which Halifax succeeded in estab-