

# Someday We'll Uphold the Right To Have Ideas, Says Adrian Scott

By RALPH FRIEDMAN

VAN NUYS, Calif.—Adrian Scott smiled wanly and absent-mindedly tapped the spacebar of his typewriter. "Things are easing up," he said, nodding a bit. "We're not having as much trouble, the resistance is weakening a little."

"Do you still sell your scripts under the table?" I asked.

"Still," he said, smiling a tired smile at the old lunacy. "Still—like the others. But it's getting better. Some changes you can put your finger on, some you can only sense."

The handsome, well-built man at the typewriter who could easily pass for Madison Avenue stock or executive caliber, on looks alone, is one of the real casualties of Hollywood's dark and panic-stricken days, when the industry caciques and much of the film colony was overcome with the cold war jitters and "un-American" frenzy.

To fully understand the story, perhaps we should go back a decade. In 1947 Scott was a well-known writer and producer. He was wealthy, successful in the industry, and highly respected wherever he was discussed.

Then came a summons from the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Together with nine other prominent members of the screen industry, Scott became one of the "Hollywood Ten" who declined to join the witchhunters on their broomstick ride. But—instead of holding fast to the Fifth Amendment—the ten based their declination to join the confessor's wailing wall and numbers game on the First Amendment.

(The chairman of the committee was J. Parnell Thomas, who now shares this distinction with Scott—

both are ex-convicts. Scott was sent to a federal penitentiary for "refusing to answer." Thomas, born Feeney, made it there for forcing his secretary to kick back her wages).

It was not until three years after the hearing that Scott and the nine others passed through the gates of the government pens. Those years, between 1947 and 1950, were the roughest time. Almost everywhere Scott and the other accused turned the sea of once-friendly faces dissipated into a strange mist and hostile, vindictive eyes emerged from the man-made fog.

Charges, suspicion, hostility—the air was fraught with fear and hysteria. Every "unfriendly witness" was looked upon as a traitor, a foreign agent, a spy trafficking in atomic secrets.

Bent forward in chair, elbow on knee and chin in hand, the greying Scott stares at the floor and tries to explain, in a voice which reflects the tortures and heroism of the soul, what took place:

"You have a way of life and suddenly it's snatched away from you. You become something of a pariah—and automatically it makes changes in you. You've achieved a certain level and it's smashed. Your whole world falls into a jum-



ADRIAN SCOTT

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bled heap, like a construction of wooden blocks knocked down before your shocked eyes. It left me trembling and lonely.

"But," continues Scott, a warm smile loosening the tautness of his

lips, "I began to understand, too. Being persecuted, I could understand what others had to contend with."

"The union organizer slipping down back streets in a company town full of thugs to bring the word of labor to the underpaid, intimidated unorganized became real to me. He emerged from the press dispatches and labor stories; he stood before me and I knew him well.

"Anti-semitism became something real, a vivid actual thing, a frightening reality, instead of being academic sort of, just on an intellectual plane, as it had been.

"I understood Jim Crow better, too. When I saw a Negro walking down the street I knew what it was to have people look at you, watch what you're doing, watch closer if you 'overstep' the line.

"And I came to know, deep down in the innards of my belly, how people feel, any people, anywhere, when they wait for the knock on the door that may take them from their homes and their loved ones."

The blacklist forced the expelled to seek new ways of earning a living. Some became truck drivers, found jobs clerking in supermarkets or working in laundries.

The psychological effects upon the blacklisted varied. Some became bitter, cynical, consigning the world and the intelligence of its human denizens to perdition. Others, however, became tougher and stronger.

### Better Writers

"Jack (John Howard) Lawson is a much better writer for what he's been through," says Adrian Scott, "and the same is true of (Dalton) Trumbo (reputedly the 'Robert Rich' who won an Academy Award this spring.) Those who remained firm, who believed in the eventual triumph of justice, these were pines who have grown into oaks."

About two years ago, as part of a penetrating presentation on the blacklist, Adrian Scott wrote these incisive paragraphs:

"Eight years have passed since the forces of reaction, spearheaded by the Un-American Activities committee, inaugurated the blacklist in Hollywood. With the evidence at hand today, the conclusion is inescapable that the immediate victims of the blacklist—those who refused to submit to the committee's demands—were not its ultimate target.

"It was the liberal who would remain employable that the committee was after; and the ultimate objective was the elimination of the liberal's ideas from the screen.

"In this objective the committee

has largely succeeded. By succumbing to political conformity, the liberal film-maker has accommodated to cultural conformity. He has been 'duped' indeed—not by his erstwhile left-wing colleagues, but by his own employers, who promised him that once the industry cleaned house, once he was rid of associates who might subvert or corrupt him, he could go on to make great humanist pictures.

### Didn't Turn Out

"It didn't turn out that way. The house-cleaning swept out his own ideas along with the men and women with whom he had worked."

In the ten years he's been blacklisted, what happened to Adrian Scott?

He sighs, a deep sigh, a draught of the bitter years. "I lost ten years of employment, one-fourth of my life," he replies. "I have gone deeply into debt. It has been destructive, psychologically and otherwise, in trying to get a living.

"I was cut off completely from the Hollywood community. A great many people were afraid to speak to me. The persecution was a full-time job in itself."

A few years ago, even as the cold war grew colder, some movie-makers surreptitiously began to approach Scott and other blacklisted writers, and since then he has made a living off the "black market."

The disadvantages in this kind of situation are numerous, not the least of which is that Scott is paid only a fraction of what his scripts would sell for if he were writing "above the table."

"And now," I asked, "it's getting better? More jobs? The freeze is thawing? You're seeing your way out of the burrow?"

### Right to Ideas

"I think so," he replied, and sighed again. "I really think so. You know, habits are hard to break if they've taken a firm hold, and the cold war thinking habit won't change overnight. But it is changing, and someday we'll uphold fully the right to have ideas—even ideas obnoxious to the majority.

"Of course, how will the majority know what is right or wrong until it can hear the ideas, but the important thing is to let ideas flourish, popular or unpopular.

"Let's have some coffee, huh? This has been a long session. But a lot more pleasant than being in the witness chair."

And Adrian Scott tapped his typewriter goodnight and opened the door of the garage that serves as his intellectual workshop.

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